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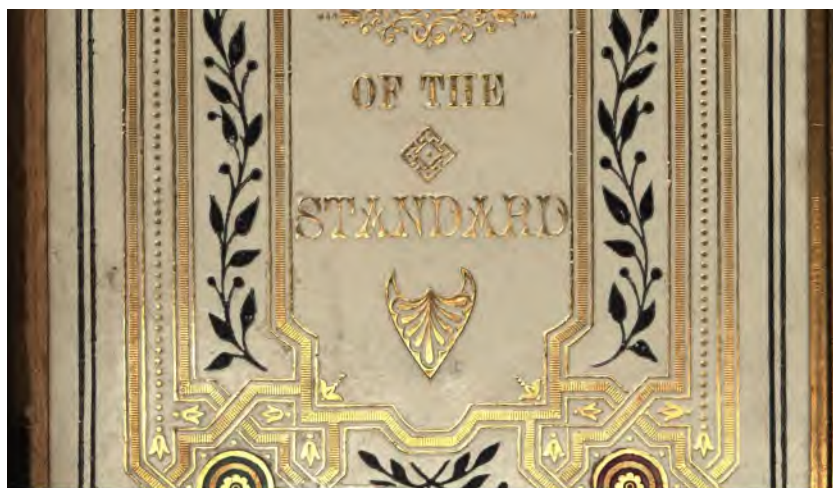
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THE BATTLE OF THE STANDARD,



THE
BATTLE OF THE STANDARD:

A Legend of the Days of King Stephen.

BY
WILLIAM ALFRED GIBBS,
AUTHOR OF "ARLON GRANGE," "HAROLD REE," "THE STORY OF A LIFE,"
ETC., ETC.

—
IN SEVEN PARTS.
—



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APOLOGY.

IT seems alike perilous and presumptuous for any author to write of Kings and Knights whilst the land is still ringing with the splendid music of the "Idylls of the King;" but inasmuch as the critical authorities of the age have hitherto unanimously acquitted me of all attempt at imitation of Mr. Tennyson, I venture to hope they will find this present poem equally free from any such attempt.

I yield to none in sincere admiration of the Laureate's genius, but before I had the high pleasure of reading his exquisite poems my form of thought had been so strongly moulded by Shakespeare and Milton, that it was incapable of changing to the more subtle and finished style of the Victorian era. This being so, the peril indeed remains, but the presumption disappears; unless it be presumption to hope that the world will never be the worse for any record of gallant deeds, even though told in the old-fashioned homely style of this present Legend.



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PROEM.

MUCH-WEARIED men of Politics and Law—
Science—Art—Commerce—Gambling or Intrigue,
Come from the mill-track labours of your lives,
And travel with the Poet for awhile ;
Imagination's starlit, airy bridge,
Built upon high-arched thoughts with rhythmic words,
Will bear us back in safety o'er the gulfs
And misty void of many centuries :

There,—standing on the cloudy edge of Time,—
“We can call spirits from the vasty deep,”
And “they will come,” to people once again
Our noble England of the Olden Days
With a grand Warrior-King, his lovely Queen,
Brave knights, bold archers, ladies fair and bright.

Yes, we will sit with them in hall and bower,
At lavish feasts—by beauty's presence crowned ;
Thence ride to stormy battle, clad in mail,
Or to and fro through that forgotten land
In errant quest of deeds of high emprise,
Thus mingling in their lives, ourselves unseen—
Yet seeing all things as they may have been.

INTRODUCTION.

THE prelude to this poem is the Legend of the Castle by the Sea, related by Colonel Reynell to the children at Arlon Grange on Christmas Eve. The incidents of that Legend are briefly these:—

King Stephen, landing from his war ships, besieges the castle in which Eustace de Bretagne was then a prisoner. The latter, by a stratagem, enables D'Auray, Montresse, De la Fosse, and a few other chosen knights to climb into his prison-tower; they kill the gaoler, and all rushing forth fight their way to the gates, and succeed in throwing them open to the King. A desperate fight commences, but in the heat of the mêlée the thunderstorm which has been raging all night and wrecking the King's ships, suddenly strikes the castle, and hurls down a huge tower into the sea. This reveals the deep dungeons in which Edgar and other noble Saxons have been long immured. A parley ensues between the King and Count Eu (the lord of the Castle) and a truce is agreed to. Thereupon Bretagne, who has won the love of Maud (Count Eu's daughter), claims her plighted troth on the eve of the commencement of this present poem.





The Battle of the Standard.

Part the First.

The Norman March through England.

FIGHT and fatigue—feasting and wassail deep—
Caused Stephen and his knights to sleep full late
So that the morrow's sun shone high and bright
Ere they arose to break that morrow's fast.

Fresh blew the wind, and jocundly the sea
Came rolling in to kiss the golden sands ;
The barques that had outrid the dreadful storm
Leapt gladly o'er the gay white-crested waves

And all astir were seen the mariners
Repairing here a rope, and there a spar ;
But these the King left anchored off the coast
And, calling all his trusty knights to horse,
Bade farewell to the " Castle by the Sea."

Hard for Bretagne to part on that bright morn
With the fair maiden he had woo'd and won
But Love must wait when Loyalty commands
And Maud—proud Maud—would have despised her
knight

Had he been recreant to his brave liege-lord.
Yet not the less the young hearts ached full sore
Sundered so suddenly,—perchance for aye.
" Aye, there's the rub ! " When loving hearts must
part

What surety is there that they meet again ?

That eve the ladye sought her lonely tower
And long sat silent, tearful with regrets

Then strove to ease her heavy heart of grief
By loving thoughts, light-woven into song.

Like long-pent falcon eager for the flight
He hath gone forth,—my loved one,—to the fight,
My glove borne proudly on his plumèd crest
My love borne lovingly within his breast.

Sad was our parting—sadder now my heart—
Ah me ! why loved we, thus so soon to part ?
Yet, love, thou know'st I would not have thee stay
In recreant idlesse from the royal fray.

Gone ! thou art gone ! How dark and drear the
skies !

For thee alone my vesper prayers arise
Fortune fight with thee in fierce war's alarms
Maria ! Madré ! shield thee from all harms !

Meantime King Stephen and his knights had sped
As fast as miry roads and swamps and fords
Permitted speed in those benighted days ;

Not far, indeed ! They sallied forth at noon
With blare of trumpets and the clank of arms
With courteous leave-takings and friendships pledged,
But scarce by sundown rode a score of miles.

The King had won upon his Saxon friends
So swiftly by his frank and gracious speech
That they donned harness and went forth with him
And by good hap now stood him in good stead.
For wist ye well in those wild days of old
Few hostelries were found upon the ways
Save in the fencèd cities or large towns ;
And fencèd cities thro' that forest land
Lay distant, each from each a long day's ride :
But Edgar—chiefest of the Saxon band—
Remembered kinsmen scattered here and there
Who still might hold some portion of their own,
If not in lands or woods, in house and home ;
And rightly judged, for one such vast old home
He sought and found ere night fell on their track ;

Here, telling briefly how by miracle
He and his comrades had escaped from thrall,
The grandsire of the house—Earl Sigbert once—
From where he sat, gazed long and earnestly
On Edgar's face as he was speaking this,—
'Then rising, fell upon his neck and wept.

Ah ! what a rush of bitter memories
Came with the old man's painful scalding tears !
The mem'ries of oppression and deep wrongs,—
Of spoliations of fair broad domains,—
Of prisons, separations, cruel deaths
Perchance far worse to witness, than endure !

Scarce this the mood in which to entertain
The Norman Stephen and his foreign knights ;
Yet Edgar, after giving grief the rein,
Spake out so warmly in King Stephen's praise
That by degrees the ancient sire was wrought
To give them Saxon-welcome to his house ;

No dainty banquet could his house afford
But bread and venison and mighty ale.
Then the blithe-hearted, frank, outspoken King
Won on his host, as erst on all hearts else,
And soothed the lifelong rancours of the past
With kindly words full of the grace of truth.

A maiden, golden-haired and sunny-eyed,—
Eyes of deep blue, so deep, so mischievous,—
Sate nestling by the grandsire at the feast
And Hugh Montresse, altho' with hunger wild,
Oft let his carving-dagger idly hang
While he gazed covertly with wonderment
At this young Saxon maiden with blue eyes :
And once, then twice, those blue eyes met his own ;
And then, albeit bold enough in fight,
Montresse looked down and trembled as in fear :
While she, oh ! she—the war of red and white
That came and went upon her soft smooth cheek
Was wondrous beautiful to Hugh Montresse ;

“Why does not Eustace mark her?” why, forsooth !
The fairest maiden o’ the whole wide world
Had failed to draw a passing glance from him
For still the sad sweet vision of his love
With smiles and tears soft-blended reigned supreme,
By absence made more sacred in his heart.

No shallow light-o’-love was bold Bretagne :
No empty-hearted twangling troubadour
With a false song for each fair face in turn,
But brave in battle, gentle in the hall,
Loyal to King, and true as steel to love !

Perchance that night a dull companion he
For the gay Count d’Auray, by whom he sat,
And who, like Hugh Montresse, had felt the charm
Of the young Saxon’s beauty fire his heart ;
“Look, Bretagne ! look ! what witchery of glance
Flashes from out those eyes of lustrous blue !
Our Norman beauties ill could bear compare

With yonder angel !” “ Hold, Sir Count ! retract !
Maud is a queen to this slight Saxon girl !
Compare, forsooth !—as well might’st thou compare
The stately swan to some wild wood-pigeon ! ”

“ To love-lorn fancies, geese may oft seem swans,”
Thought Count d’Auray ; and might have uttered it,
But at that moment Stephen and his host
Broke up the feast ; and, seeking welcome rest,
The King and knights rode thro’ the Land of Dreams.

Next morn at daybreak, roused with sound of horn,
They once more gathered round the well-filled board ;
And then, with stirrup-cup to speed them on
Thro’ the chill morning, passed upon their way.
Their way this morning lay through better roads—
Old Roman roads, narrow and steep, but firm ;
Their great war-horses’ hoofs rang sharp and clear
As, two and two, the mail-clad knights rode on
And sharp and clear, with spirit-stirring clank

Sword, spur, and shield rang out the soldier's tune ;
Rough jests and hearty laughter passed along
From one to one, oft up and down the line
Like to the sea-spray flying sparkingly ;
Then Richard de la Fosse, as on they rode,
Trolled laughingly a careless soldier-song
In which the others joined as best they could :

Ho ! ho ! Sir Knight,
What is thy delight ?
Lovest thou fighting or feasting best,
Or hawk or hound, or the tourney ground
With thy Ladye's pledge on thy plumèd crest ?

I love my hawk and I love my hound
And my gallant horse with his springing bound
But the ring of the tourney I love the best !
With my visor down and my lance in rest
With my Ladye's favour on plumèd crest
With teeth clenched hard and rein gripped tight
To dash my horse at a boasting knight.

And thou, Sir Knight
What is thy delight ?
Lovest thou fighting or feasting best,
Or hawk or hound, or the tourney ground
With thy Ladye's pledge on thy plumèd crest ?

I love a good feast, and I love my hawk,
And in Ladye's bower sweet loving talk
And I dearly love the gallant chase
With the stag in sight, the hounds at a race
And the horses full strain to keep their place ;
But of all delights, 'tis my chief delight
To join in the clash of a well-fought fight.

"Well said, good Richard de la Fosse ! well said
Rang out King Stephen, riding swiftly up ;
"On many a well-fought field, I ween, brave knig
Hast thou been with me, ever to the front."

"And many more, my Liege, I hope to see,
If not in England, then in Normandie."

“What ! hast turned minstrel, Richard ?” quoth the
king,
Thou rhymest like a silken troubadour.”

“ In war there's stirring reason for my rhyme :
The measured tramp of stalwart men-at-arms,
The ringing of the armour—clank, clash, clank—
The trumpets, and the sharp, short, stern command
The shout, the cheer, the glorious thundrous ‘ Charge,’
When the earth shakes beneath the iron hoofs
Of some twelve hundred horses at full speed
With loosened rein spurred madly on the foe,—
This is the music that best pleaseth me !
Oh could I have a learned scribing clerk
To ride to battle with me—by my fay,
He should have fair employment, noting down
The wild old war-songs that come rolling up
From the dim cloudland of my childhood's days.
My great-great-grandsire, so our annals tell,
Fought uuder Charlemagne, and in those days

Of war and minstrelsy was laurel-crowned
Alike for valour and for poesy ;
So the old songs descended with the blood
From sire to son until they reached my heart
And in my heart they live, and there will die."

" Why die, Sir Richard ?—thou wilt have an heir ! "

" Not I, my liege ! ne'er saw I yet the maid
Whose beauty stirred my heart like glorious war."

" Thou'lt have enow of it, brave knight, ere-long ;
But now look round.—Is not this fairy-land ?
Look how yon silvery sun-lighted mist
Lifts and reveals broad fields besprent with pearls,
So fair, so white in holy purity
That e'en the sun seems dazzled with delight
And sheds on earth a mellowed softened warmth.
See from the sparkling, frosted plain stand out
Grand trunks of giant trees—vast thicket growths

Rich in their green and gold and ruby tints ;
So rich, so glorious, that we well might deem
They were full-laden with delicious fruit
Like orchards of the fair Hesperides !
Say, can the ocean in its grandest form,
Or rugged cliff, or lofty mountain peak
Compare in beauty with this forest scene ?

Now all the mists have vanished, like the doubts
And dark uncertainties that chill the blood
Upon the morn of battle, ere the clash
Of the first onslaught fills the veins with fire,
And, like a veil that hid the white-robed bride
Reveals a beauty we scarce dreamed could be.

Oh, lovely England, thou shalt be my bride !
I'll woo thee like a soldier, clad in steel
And win thee at the hazard of my life ;
But winning thee,—when once thou art my own
I'll buckler thee against the world in arms !”

So spake the King, and troth 'twas fair to see
On sunny autumn morning this bright scene,—
The plumèd helmets flashing in the sun,
The pennons, the devices on the shields,
The large war-horses stepping proudly on
Y'clad in gay caparisons and mail
And, ever and anon, with bounding plunge
Curvetting with a merry demivolt.

The horsemen all had halted like one man
At the first lifting of the sunny mist
But when the King ceased speech, with one great
 bound
They broke into a gallop o'er the plains
Nor reined their chargers till the forest closed
Again upon the narrow Roman road ;
This now descending steeply, and more steep
At every stride, soon led them to a ford,
Which crossing, they descried far off the camp
Of the King's army led by Peverill.

A shout went up as Stephen and his knights
Rode proudly in, and up and down the lines ;
Then, in the chief's pavilion entertained,
They gladly met a goodly brotherhood
Of old companions both of feast and fray.

Two hours of rest refreshed both men and steeds
And then the King prickt forward in good haste,
Hoping to reach the nearest friendly town
Ere darkness ;—but at eve the morning mist
Came back with reinforcements from low marsh,
Broad stagnant pools, and plashy forest rides
And creeping stealthily around the King
Concealed him from his knights and knight from
knight
With such a dense and cloudy canopy
That none could tell another save by shout.

Then spake the Saxon Edgar to the King :
“ I will dismount and seek a sere pine branch,

This lighted will enable those who list
To find another like it ; then I lead,—
All follow single file ; and as my torch
Burns low, let him who follows next to me
Ride up, and, lighting his, take lead in turn."

After oft failing, flint and glaive of steel
Produced the infant fire, which deftly nursed
Kindled the pine torch ;—thus they passed along
Slowly and warily upon their way ;
Each in his turn rode forward to the front
Lighting his torch, and holding it low down
To show the road-track to his straining eyes.

Anon a friendly beacon-fire blazed out,
Hung from the battlements of Tonbridge Tower
And at that moment the dense mist rolled off
And fair and brightly shone the welcome moon.

A parley with the warder on the walls
And then the ponderous drawbridge was let down,

The portcullis upraised, and gates flung wide
T' admit King Stephen and his weary knights.

Right well they slept, *sans* rocking, in their beds
Of straw and heather,—after goodly cheer
And deep and frequent stoups of gen'rous wine.

The morrow was devoted to idlesse,
To rest the horses and the younger men ;
So these claimed license to go lounge and jest
With the fair Saxon girls of Tonbridge town
While King and chiefs held council in the hall.

'Twas there determined to despatch a knight
Light armed, and mounted on the fleetest horse,
To London, there to see, and thence bring word
How stood the citizens for Stephen's cause ;
Meantime the men-at-arms and yeomanry
Should steadily draw hither, and then on,
Till one day's march advanced before the King.

The chosen knight—'twas easy to foresee—
Was Richard de la Fosse ; not his the mood
For saucy dalliance with fair demoiselle
Or horse-play jestings, gamblings or intrigue ;
“ Adventure ” was the passion of the man—
The bolder still the better. On his steed
He vaulted with a blithe and jocund heart
Discumbered from all armour—light as air—
With sword and dagger only for his guards.

Commission with the King's seal carried he
To potent crafty scheming Winchester,
And let no grass grow 'neath his swift steed's hoofs.

The day was far advanced tow'rds sunset hour
Ere Richard passed from out the castle gate
But little recked he of fast-coming night.
Edgar with dagger's point had sketched his track
And De la Fosse, with soldier's instinct, saw
How best to use the knowledge thus obtained ;

Forewarnèd also of the darkling mists
Bretagne had sought and found in Tonbridge town .
A cunning alchemist, and by his aid
Prepared a torch, which, kindled by Greek fire,
Sprang to a blaze with bright far-casting flame ;
This, in his huntsman's straight horn scabbarded,
Sir Richard carried at his saddle-bow
Like sword of fire to guide the sword of steel.

Meantime, to while away the short delay
'Ere De la Fosse could bring sure tidings back
The King gave order for a royal chase—
A wolf-hunt ; for the wild and ravening packs
Increasing thro' neglect and troublous times
Had carried havock 'mongst the sheep and beeves
And driven far and wide the herds of deer ;
A wolf-hunt——

Certes ! somewhat nobler chase
Than one poor timid, screaming, panting hare
Chased for ten minutes by some score of hounds——

Headed back here and there by clodpole clowns
And scared to blindest terror by the sound
Of ten or twenty huntsmen on her track ;—
Poor wretch ! ten minutes of such agony
To end in being ravened from limb to limb
Half eaten—yet alive—by savage fangs !
Were it a cat, 'twere not so cowardly
For that might scratch a hound or two ; perchance
Some valiant huntsman also, if too bold !
But this soft, utterly defenceless thing,
How can men kill it thus without a blush ?
Nay, more, kill three or four of such, just thus,
And then ride proudly home, and call it “sport” !
The hunting instinct hath outlived its use
When such poor wretched quarry is its “sport.”

The wolf-hunt—

Not a solitary beâst
But the whole pack, were circled slowly round
And driven out to fight or stand at bay.

The serfs and villeins went at early dawn
To pile and light huge fires at all the glades
On three sides of the forest,—then with shouts
And blare of horns they drove the savage thieves
To seek escape through that one open side ;
There, guarding every pass, stood archers bold
And sturdy yeomen armed with hunting knives
Holding fleet wolf-hounds ready on the slip ;
The King and mounted knights rode to and fro
To chase and spear such as might else escape.

'Twas fray as well as hunt, this gallant sport :
With wolf and wolf-dog 'twas an even fight ;
And parlous for the archer if his shaft
Missed hitting the fierce beast with gleaming teeth
That came full rush upon him.

Then the time
For yeoman with his knife to strike his best ;
That failing, the staunch hounds were swift unslipped
And cheered and aided by the mounted knights

Headed the quarry back. Then lance or sword
Had chance to show its wielder's skill in turn—
An ugly chance—if steed or slipped or fell,
For hand 'gainst jowl, and hunting knife 'gainst
fangs

Waged in the field, apt mimicry of war :
War to the knife indeed ! no quarter there
Or asked or granted upon either side !

Such was the chase that stirred King Stephen's blood,
That showed the mettle of his younger knights,
That roused the older warriors like a horn,
That trained the courage of the men-at-arms,
Gave steadiness to stalwart archer's aim
And freed the land from foul marauding beasts.

Twice in that day the King, dismounted, fought
And slew each time his foe.

But from the third
And last encounter he with hazard 'scaped ;

For two huge wolves together rushed at him,
Mad with the desperate rage begot by fear ;
Their thin red lips drawn back from glistening teeth,
Their archèd crests curved up like serpents' necks,
Bristling with hunted anger, and their eyes—
Wild flashing eyes of fury and despair—
Oft haunted Stephen in his after-dreams.
Upreared, they dashed at him with such fierce force
That he reeled backwards ; but by happy chance
Gervase de Bohun, Stephen's youngest knight,
Spurred up his charger and with well-aimed thrust
Speared one of the two monsters thro' the neck
Whilst his trained war-horse rearing, struck straight
out,
And rolled the other savage in the mire.

From equal peril Eustace de Bretagne
Saved Hugh Montresse on that eventful day ;
Hugh's charger swerving at a rush of wolves
Lost foothold on the plashy, miry plain

And falling with him, pinned him to the ground ;
The wolves attacked at once both man and horse
But Eustace to the rescue came at speed
Swept a clean circle round them with his sword
And kept the brutes at bay till Count d'Auray
And Edgar riding up, with dogs and men,
Chased them away, and speared them as they fled.

A mighty raid it was ; and villeins' wives
And oft-scared children blessed the gallant King
For ridding thus their land of this dread scourge.

But young Gervase de Bohun by the King
Was hailed the hero of that day of chase,
And many a health was drunk to him that eve
When all returned to feasting in the hall.





Part the Second.

**The March continued, and the Triumphal
Entry into London.**

PROUD was De Bohun—proud—but still more
glad

That Fortune thus had thrown to him the chance
To aid and rescue his beloved King ;—
For Gervase loved his liege-lord with a love
Almost akin to blind idolatry.

Aye ! he had read his Monarch's noble face
Like as a pedant reads his favourite book ;
And a right-royal book to read, I ween,
Was the King's visage ;—a grand massive brow,—
Finely marked features of the Norman type
To which the warrior's bronze gave manliness,
An eagle eye that flashed with scathing fire

When treason or oppression roused its wrath
But like warm sunshine breaking thro' a cloud
When the sweet, gracious, swiftly-kindled smile
Broke thro' the clouds of frequent-coming care.

In thought, or in repose, it might seem stern,
But the King's sternness was scarce more than feigned
To check presumption or rebuke a fault
When both had grown too heinous ; little faults
And passing errors he o'erlooked with ease ;
Not his the meanly microscopic eye
That magnifies the sins and petty wrongs
Which all men do to all, scarce consciously
Throughout all life ; nor his the fretful heart
To chafe and worry through its Summer day
Because the world is full of such small wrongs :
Nor did he bring the burning-glass of wrath
To scorch and sear these surface blemishes,
Regardless of the smarting, angered wound
That follows from a merciless rebuke—

Far rather would he seem to see them not
Or, seeing, strive to heal them with a glance
Of kindly pity—like the fabled cure
Of the King's-evil, healed by the King's touch.

What wonder then that Gervase loved him well !
His faith in Stephen's courage, wisdom, skill,
Was simply boundless.

In the young knight's creed

The King could do no wrong in very sooth,
Not as mere cunning fiction of the law.
His blithe heart bounded with supreme delight
When Stephen called him from amongst his knights
And placed him for the banquet at his side ;
On went the feast right merrily, for each
Had some adventure, hazardous or droll
Of this or former chases, to recount
Thus sometimes laughter seemed to unseal song
And then from song rose laughter, like a fount
Sparkling and splashing with refreshing spray.

But now an outer horn rang high and clear
And whilst its echoes lingered, bold De Fosse
Leapt from his horse and strode into the hall.

“Welcome, Sir Richard !” “Ere we ask his news,
Give him some wine.” “My gallant trusty knight
Thou look'st sore travel-stained,—a weary way
At speed thou must have traversed to return
A full day sooner than we looked for thee !”

“Thanks to my horse, my liege, more than myself—
(Let him be cared for, Walter, well to-night ;
See to that chafe beneath his girth, good squire.)
Right glad, O King, shall I too be to rest
But I have breath enow to tell good news :
Thy potent brother, holy Winchester,
Hath so won o'er the citizens to thee
And thy good cause, that when thy pennon flies
In sight of London, thou wilt be proclaimed
And hailed with shouts as ‘Stephen, England's King !’”

“ Good news, indeed, thou bringest, noble knight ;
And that our thanks be not mere empty words,
We do create thee Baron De la Fosse
And Lord of Arlon, in our own fair land ;
When Stephen is the Lord of England too,
Look to have better gifts than these from him :
Now feast and rest ; for by to-morrow’s dawn
We will set on. Is’t moonlight, my good lord ? ”
“ Yea ; bright as day.” “ Then, Gervase, swift to horse
And forward to the camp ; see all astir
And marching on by daybreak ;—tell the news,—
They’ll march the gayer for it. Now, D’Auray,
Eustace, and noble Edgar, come with us
To plan our morrow’s route ; brave knights give heed
To the reveille ;—until then, fare ye well.”

While Richard cut his way thro’ warden-pie
And quaffed a goodly stoup of generous wine
The mirth grew louder in the lower hall
Amongst the archers and the men-at-arms ;

No longer awed by presence of the King
They sang their songs more freely, each in turn
Extolling his own weapon in rude rhymes :
Perchance the best worth record was Ranoulf's
In praise of cloth-yard shaft and staunch yew bow :—

Ho ! the long ash lance and the two-handed sword
Are trusty good weapons for baron or lord
And the battleaxe, wielded in knightly hand,
Is a pretty defence against lance and brand—

But ho ! ho ! ho !

Give me my good bew,

And I fear neither lordly nor knightly foe.

We care not a doit for your mace and your spear,
Or your long Saxon bill with its hook so queer ;
With our good yew bows and our cloth-yard arrows
We'll shoot ye all down like a flock of sparrows—

Then ho ! ho ! ho !

Give me my good bow,

And to battle or wolf-hunt I'll merrily go.

Oh, your horse in the chase may be strong and fleet
And your falcon's swift wings may the heron beat
Your hounds may yelp after the wolf or the stag
And of all their grand doings you all may brag—

But ho ! ho ! ho !

The shaft from my bow
Swifter than falcon or horse will go.

Up in the air—yet the eagle's eyes
See not the arrow by which he dies ;
Over the plain—yet the bounding roe
Sees not the cause of its mortal throe ;

So swift doth it go,

The shaft from my bow,
It pierces the hart ere the hind doth know.

“By Mars ! good archer,” quoth the new-made lord,
“I would thou hadst been with me yester-morn,
Thy ten sharp arrows had been well bestowed
Upon a parlous game ! Listen, young knights !
At daybreak, after some two hours of rest
I prickt across an open forest-plain,

Shouting some snatches of an old war-song
And joying greatly in the crisp fresh air
That beat upon me as I sped along,—
When with a thundering sound that shook the earth
A herd of beasts with most portentous horns
Came charging at me, crashing thro' the woods
Tow'rd which my course was bent ; sudden they stood
Halting, with upreared heads, then sudden turned
As if with panic seized ;—content was I
Rather to see their upreared tails, than horns ;
But soft—again—they halted with a jerk,—
Wheeled round and faced me ;—troth I liked it not,
But still kept on my course ; once more they fled,
But this time nor so swiftly nor so far,
Then closer charged at me with bellowing roar.

Shall I confess, sirs, that I made a halt ?
I did not care to chance my life that day
Because I bore good tidings for the King ;—
Had they been ill, perchance I had not cared.

I then bethought me of my sword of fire,—
The strange device contrived by wise Bretagne ;
Swift-lighted and aflame, with ringing shout,
And spurs well home into my good steed's flanks
I dashed right at them, whirling high my torch
Until great sparks and flashes of red flame
Flew far and wide, and dazzled their wild eyes !
Thus parted right and left, in sore affright,
I rode straight thro' the herd which, once disperst,
Made off and left me scatheless. Ho ! some wine,
And then to rest, for I am wearied, knights !”

•

Meantime, Gervase rode forth in joyous mood,
Gladdened with feast and wine, and fired by praise ;
His youthful blood swift coursing thro' his veins
Had flushed his brow with well-nigh fever-heat,
Hence the delicious coolness of the night
Came like a sea-breeze on a sultry noon
Bringing refreshment and new energies :
Nought was so high, so steep so difficult

But what his gallant horse and trusty sword
Could overleap or crash at or cut through :

Then, when this fierce exultant mood soothed do
His young and ardent soul, attuned to love,
Thrilled with the beauty of the sylvan scenes
Thro' which he passed ; it seemed enchanted land
The moonlight streamed away o'er hill and dale
Bringing out sharp and clear against the sky
The infinite wild beauty of the trees
With all their faëry tracery of form
Ascending from the vast black massive trunk
Disparting thence into an hundred arms,—
Each arm of giant strength,—and thence again
Parting and branching out in sylvan spray
Pointing with myriad fingers at the stars.

“ Yes ! yes ! ” (he raved) “ the stars ! And mine
star
Rides high in heaven, shining brightly down

Upon its own true knight. Oh! mystic light
That ruleth ever o'er my destiny
Under whose influence my young life began
Lead me to triumph! triumph ever thus!
My spirit leaps and soars,—my very horse
Seems instinct with a wild abounding life
And bears me forward, upward, as with wings!

Now should I joy to charge with ringing spear
E'en stalwart De la Fosse or vast Montresse—
Aye, both of them at once;—mine arm is strung
With such strange strength, it aches to strike at steel!
Ha! by good chance! Lo! robbers in my track!
Have at ye, villains!—caitiffs! clear the way!"

'Twas e'en as Bohun said—three grim strong knaves
Well armed with staves and bills, sprung from a wood
And barred his path. One strove to seize his rein
But simply lost his hand in the attempt,—
For in his rhapsody the wild young knight

Had drawn his sword upon a fancied foe
And hence 'twas ready for the sudden swoop
Which sent the maimed man howling thro' the wood
Another ruffian, with a dexterous lift
Unhorsed Gervase ; and ill he then had fared
But his staunch charger wheeled and struck the th
With iron heel that laid him sprawling wide ;
Bohun sprang up like lightning from the ground
And after two or three well-guarded blows
Of staff and bill against well-wielded sword
Cut down the third foe ere his comrade rose ;
But he, the fiercest and the strongest, rushed
With rage upon the knight, and bore him hard
With flail-like blows from pond'rous quarterstaff ;
Then, trusting to his axe, he strove to close
So rashly, that he rushed upon the sword
Wounding Gervase indeed, but killed himself.

His mother's scarf, woven by loving hands,
Now wove the spell of succour for her son

Who bound it firmly round his aching wound
Mounted his horse, and wended on his way.

The moon still shone in heaven, the stars were bright
But Bohun did not think the scene so fair,
Nor did he greatly crave to meet more foes ;
Not sorry either was he to espy
The tents and camp-fires of the well-watched host.

His good news spread like wildfire through the camp ;
And ere the morrow's dawn had streaked the sky
The army was afoot and on the march.
The barber-surgeon dressed the young knight's wound
Which, tho' a shrewd one, nought disabled him
From riding with the others.

As they passed
Through straggling villages with roll of drum
And blare of trumpet, Saxon-folk came out
To scowl with hate and fear upon the host.
Not yet forgotten—ne'er to be forgot

The tyrannies of conquest,—men were there—
Old men with withering hatred in their eyes,
Handless, by fierce decree of forest law ;
Others, with eyes put out in manhood's prime,
Listening with clenched teeth and beating hearts
To th' insulting trumpets' pealing notes
With bitter curses rising to their lips.
Few who mourned not some death, or worse than death,
Done to a mother, sister, daughter, wife,
By the licentious, scoffing conquerors.

Oh, England ! England ! hold thine own, dear land !
Let not “ the proud hoofs of a Conqueror ”
Trample again upon thy virgin plains !
Guard well thy noble cities,—now so rich
That all the warrior-nations, sword in hand
Forecast their spoil with undissembled greed
And hungrily await the despot's nod
To hurl their armed millions on the prey.
The lust of conquest-plunder rages wide

And monstrous grows with what it feeds upon ;
These armed millions must be fed with gold
And larger cravings follow each huge meal.

“ But whence the quarrel,” say’st thou ? Oh, be sure
Quarrel is always easy to the strong !
The silent autocrats—by whose sole will
Vast armies march and concentrate—can make
Dissension on the ninth part of a hair
And force swift battle at their chosen hour.

This is no mildly-meek millennial age,
Wherein the lion, dwindling to the lamb
With plaintive bleat and deprecating baa
Can soothe the savage wolf across the stream :
The stream indeed divides thee as of yore
Yet e’en of yore ’twas crossed to thy deep shame
But now, by subtle science well-nigh bridged
’Tis but an easy leap for war’s were-wolves
Whose ravening fangs could tear thee limb from limb.

Can ye not see them darkening the bleak plains
With countless legions in the ice-bound north?
That bitter mother, that ferocious nurse,
Who ever driveth forth half-famished broods
To seek their prey in lands of luxury:
Onward they come like to a surging flood,—
Swelled by the streams of Austria's myriad hosts
And new Germania's soldier-peopled land—
Onward they come,—the Vandal and the Hun—
Croat and Cossack—Teuton—Magyar—
In nature little changed since Attila!

A common instinct binds them, and will bind,
In secret league by subtle state-craft forged;
Their enterprize? Thy conquest! True, the spoil
Will break the fragile league, for always thieves
Do quarrel o'er their plunder; but to thee,—
Robbed, ravished, ruined, made to lick the dust
From off the conqueror's feet,—small comfort that!
Will their fierce after-strifes give back the blood

Of all the noblest, bravest of thy land
Slaughtered in hopeless, unprepared defence?
Will it dry up the agonizing tears
Of outraged women, or wash off the stains
The foul pollutions, and the nameless shames
Inflicted by a brutal soldiery?

Still Saxon! still supine! Will nothing warn?
Will nothing rouse thee from thy lethargy?
Is it so long since gallant Denmark lost
Half of her scanty kingdom, and but holds
The other half on suff'rance?—Austria then,
The mighty spoiler, swift in turn despoiled
Crushed,—conquered,—in a few hot summer weeks!
And next proud France!—grand military France!
Thine ancient foe,—thy last and best ally,—
She too struck down in shame, and overwhelmed
O'errun, dismembered,—humbled to the dust!
Her gold—that “god of peace”—wrung from her grasp
And turned into the stern steel god of war

Whose armèd heel, pressed on her bleeding neck
Still holds her prostrate in her stifled wrath.

Who next, O England ! think ye well who next
Shall be the Moloch's victim ;—who ? Thyself !—
There is none else to conquer—oh ! so rich,
So busy, and so peaceably inclined !
So much averse to aught that hinders trade,
Or wastes good money in mere “soldiering.”

Yet think, most prudent trader,—forasmuch
As money is thy chiefest heaven-on-earth,—
What talisman of trade will then bring back
The precious idol—the belovèd gold ?
Why then perchance (too late) you may perceive
It had been wiser to devote large part
Of this enormous oft-times squandered wealth
To guard the other ;—but plod on ! plod on !
Buy, sell, and chaffer—till the thunder roars
On all thy seas, and 'neath the cannon's flash

A storm of armed men, thick, thick as hail
Is dashed upon thy coasts ; thence driven on
Marking their ghastly paths with hideous woes
And shrieking desolations ;—then ? Oh, then—
By glare of burning palaces thou’lt see,
By sack and pillage thou wilt be convinced,
By blood and iron thou’lt be forced to own
“ It had been wiser to devote large part
Of this superfluous oft-times ill-used wealth
To guard the rest ;” but still plod on ! plod on !
Still Saxon, still supine ; still hive and thrive
Till thy Fool’s Paradise, swift shrivelled up
By the fierce flames of war, reveals a hell
Swarming with ruthless demons,—mocking fiends.

The host marched on with banner, trump, and drum,
Nought caring for the scowls of village serfs
Whilst sure of Norman-welcome in the towns.
After noon-halt that day, up rode the King
D’Auray, Montresse, and Richard De la Fosse

Edgar the Saxon, Eustace de Bretagne
And all the chivalry of Stephen's host.

“Set on for London!”—passed the word along!
Then cheerily upsprung the men-at-arms,
And gaily marched the archers with their bows,
Bedecked with ribbon as for festival.
Now when the nearly level evening sun
Shone on Saint Paul’s, the scouts came spurring back
To tell King Stephen that a grand array
Of loyal citizens was riding forth
To meet and welcome him.

Anon they came,
Some clad in armour, some in rich fur robes,
With sword and cap and mace and massive keys
Borne upon velvet cushions : then the Mayor,—
A frank, bluff citizen, spake out and said,
“God save King Stephen ! Welcome, noble King !
Thy citizens rejoice to see thee here ;—
With loyal hands our sailors dress the ships

In all the bravery of flags,—gay banners wave
From every housetop ; high on sloping roofs
The people climb to see thee ; ladyes' eyes
Greet thee with smiles from casements, balconies ;
But an' it please ye cross our London Bridge
And feast with us this eve in old Guildhall
A braver welcome yet we'll strive to show."

Pleased with the simple frankness of the man
The King assented.—On his right hand rode
Edgar the Saxon,—on his left the Mayor
And three abreast the nobles and the knights
On their great war-horses rode proudly in
Followed by men-at-arms and archers bold
Marching with stately warlike discipline.

To many, London streets were new and strange
And much they marvelled at the narrow ways,—
The wooden houses, quaintly picturesque
With carven half-round casements jutting out

One o'er another, till from upper rooms
The friendly neighbours living opposite
Could well-nigh greet each other with hand's grasp.

“ Ah, me ! what charming little love-passages
Those upper rooms might tell of, could they speak ! ”
So doubtless thought the younger knights that day
As the coy blushing faces peeping out
Shot down sharp arrows from their sparkling eyes.
Gay flags and banners flaunted in the breeze
The bells clanged forth, the trumpets rent the air
Whilst all the people swarmed the streets, and cheered
To see “ the Saxon ” at the King's right hand.

Aye, many a father held his young son high,
That so the boy might say in after-years,
“ I saw King Stephen enter London then.”
A trivial action,—a most homely type
Of how the young age mounts upon the old ;
But the King noted this,—it drew again

The one sad warp that wove its thread of black
Thro' the gay colours of his now bright life.
"My children mount not thus by me," he thought ;
"Nay, worse,—perchance, my height may prove their
fall."

This thought had oft beset him since the day
When, in the ardour of impulsive zeal
For England's peace, he made the hasty vow
That Henry should be King if so 'twas willed.
But the loud lavish banquet in the hall—
Wherein were gathered all his noble knights,
Fair city dames and dainty demoiselles,
All eager to do honour to their King,—
Dispelled dull forecasts of the times to come :
So merrily the great feast passed away
And had its end, like all things great and small ;
But ere it ended, Count D'Auray had craved
His Monarch's leave to go on errant quest,
Whereof he said not much ; nor that, the truth.



Part the Third.

Count D'Auray's Quest.

A STUTE D'Auray—his mother's southern blood
Mingled its influence, swiftly passionate,
With the strong Norman's cold and hard self-will ;
Subtle in council, savage in revenge
Graceful in person, smoothly treacherous
Insatiable and cruel e'en in love ;
And "love," I ween, was now Count D'Auray's quest.

The trumpeters had scarce proclaimed the morn
When forth from ancient hostelry out-rode,—
Splendidly mounted and but slightly armed,—
The Count attended by three trusty squires.

The sturdy 'prentices stood all agape
With their half-opened shutters in their hands

To watch the gallant horses as they passed
Bounding with morning freshness in their limbs
Snorting with pleasure at the glad escape
From stifling stable into open air
And scenting grassy pastures far away.
Over the bridge the horsemen rode amain
And clattered gaily on through rough-paved streets
Thence gained the open fields and thickening woods.

The winter frosts and thaws and heavy rains
Had sorely broken up the country roads,
But stout and staunch their steeds, and well they
bore
These light-armed horsemen thro' the clay-like sloughs ;
Gladly and oft they left the miry track,
Whene'er a well-known steeple came in sight,
To take a cross-way over brook or fence ;
Thus riding on for many a weary hour
The knight and squires came gladly to a halt
At a rude farmstead on a lonely plain.

Meantime Montresse at morning council missed
The Count D'Auray, and hearing of this quest,
With jealous instinct shrewdly guessed its aim ;
Hence he, too, craved and gained the King's assent
To leave the court, and mounting in hot haste
Set forth alone, like sleuth-hound in pursuit.
First from the warders, afterward from serfs,
Whom here and there he met upon the road,
He gained enow of guidance to the track
Of his suspected rival,—and rode on
With lowering brow and anger in his spurs.
Two days he followed yet o'ertook him not
But on the third, tow'rd eventide, it chanced
The Count's horse plunging thro' a deep morass
Strained itself hopelessly ;—a trusty squire
Dismounting gave his charger to his lord
And led the lamed steed after as he might ;
Now this delay enabled Hugh Montresse
To gain upon his rival in such wise
That as D'Auray wound horn at Sigbert's gate

And asked a shelter for the coming night,
Montresse just caught the echoes from afar.

Sir Hugh drew rein, and pondered on what plea
He also could claim shelter for the night.
Now being but a blunt, slow-witted man,
Immense in body, but not great in craft,
He could bethink him of nought else to say
Save an outright, big, burly, stalwart lie ;
So he too wound his horn at Sigbert's gate
And loudly asked if Count D'Auray were there.

Much marvelled Sigbert why two Norman knights
Should follow thus each other, but Montresse,
Having rehearsed his part, now blurted out
That he had followed by the King's command
To summon back, with haste, the Count D'Auray ;
Then, having thus plunged deep in falsehood's slough,
He floundered on and on with reasons why :
"Rumours of war in Scotland ;" and "the Queen

Landed at Arundel ;” “treason in the camp,”
And doubts and dangers lurking everywhere.”

The Count flushed angrily and bit his lip,—
For once outwitted ;—he could nought gainsay
But what such things might be ; howe’er to-night
Come Queen or Scots for England’s woe or weal,
The rival knights were feasted—and the maid,
The fair young Saxon girl, was there again
More beautiful than ever to their eyes.

Lesser in stature, slighter far in form
Than the large Norman women of that age
She would have seemèd yet scarce more than child
But for the flowing undulating lines
The delicately-rounded shape and arm,
And wondrous grace of early womanhood.
Her movements,—when at last she dared advance
To meet and greet the scarcely-welcome guests,—
Showed native gentleness and soft repose.

Death's shadowed hand and sorrow-mingled fear
Had pressed full heavily on that fair brow
Giving a tender pensiveness of glance
To eyes that still betrayed bright latent fire ;
Hers was the type of beauty which had won
E'en from the stern lips of the Roman Saint
The exclamation of "Sed Angeli !"
'Twas therefore little marvel, tho' foul wrong,
That Norman sinners sought to seize such prize.

Aye, had she known,—poor, weak, defenceless
dove,—
What wild, self-willed, hot passions raged beneath
The surface-courtesies of these two knights
As each in turn addressed himself to her
And strove to win a smiling answer back,
She would have fled the hall ; but, serpent-like,
By slow degrees the courtier Count D'Auray
Won on her confidence, and with the charm
Of subtly-chosen tales of courts and camps

And strange adventures both by sea and land,—
Told with bright mirth and flashing gaiety,—
He led her to and fro through fairy-land
Until her young eyes sparkled with delight
And the sweet fountains of her silvery speech
Came rippling forth with voice most musical ;
E'en the old grandsire felt this potent charm
And caught faint echoes of their gaiety.

Poor huge Montresse was worsted in this war
And sate in gloomy silence ; sullen wrath
Gathering within him like a thunder-cloud ;
This spurred D'Auray to foil him more and more
And oft a pointed arrow of keen wit
He shot at him with shrewd and stinging aim
To force a smile, which scarce could be repressed,
From gentle Elfrid, who would droop the fringe
Of long dark eyelashes o'er merry eyes
Pretending not to mark the arrow's flight.
But Montresse marked it well ; and lest his wrath

Might suddenly burst forth, with words abrupt
He bade "Good night," and strode from out the
hall.

Soon the old grandsire nodded as the hours
Grew long past curfew.

Then D'Auray with skill
Charmed Elfrid's ear with love-*tales* ; tender scenes
Of knights and ladies parting, ne'er to meet ;—
True noble knights, faithful to love in death
Wearing their ladies' favours on their crests
And giving to their beauty world-renown :
Then as the blush was followed by the tear,
Like raindrops falling from a rose-hued cloud,—
The Count grew bolder, and with whisper soft
Said, " Lovely Elfrid, let me be thy knight !
The fame of thy sweet beauty shall be known
In every court in Europe.

Far and wide
I'll bear thy favours proudly on my crest ;

Wherever war and tourney lead me forth
Thee I'll proclaim the Lady of my Love ! ”

Like as when timid fawn beside a lake
Flies in wild fear when startled by the horn
And the fierce staghound's bay, tho' faint and far,—
So, with like terror, Elfrid rose and fled ;
For at these ardent, unexpected words,
The timid nature of the lonely girl
Returned upon her with redoubled force ;
Nor failed her woman's instinct in that hour
To warn her with a swift and sudden fear
Of the steel hand beneath the velvet glove
Of this smooth, subtle courtier, Count D'Auray.

The grandsire wakened at the rustling robe
And marvelled why his Elfrid thus had gone ;
But D'Auray, ever-ready, said she feared
To rouse him, yet was weary and o'erspent,
And he, too, fain would seek much-needed rest.

“Good night !” but not to slumber went the Count ;
Like eagle baulked of quarry, high in air
Went his strong-wingèd thoughts and hot desires
Circling and poising oft to mark some point
For other, surer swoop upon his prey.

Long ere the dawn he roused his sleeping squires
And bade them deftly change his lamèd steed
For Hugh Montresse’s charger, and prepare
With speed for instant flight at signal given.

Iachimo, the Count’s Italian squire
His crafty aide in many a wild intrigue,—
Had well fulfilled his old accustomed part
Of winning to their purpose Elfrid’s maid ;
By her then roused, with sudden false alarm,
The Saxon beauty donned her robes in haste
And, issuing from her chamber, was borne off
By traitorous D’Auray, who scrupled not
To stifle back her cry with ruthless hand ;



But ere they could to horse, Sir Hugh Montresse,
Who had but laid aside his lance and helm
And flung himself upon his couch, nor slept,
Except at intervals, throughout the night,
Seizing his sword, rushed out to seek the cause
Of heavy footsteps and the muffled cry ;
His pent-up rage now burst into a fire
Of maddest passion.

“Traitor ! recreant knight !”

Three words of scorn intensified by wrath
Came with his sword-blow aimed at D'Auray's head ;
The blow missed aim,—else had it been the last,—
But glancing past the head, struck on his arm
With wound so deep, as forced him to release
His fainting captive ; but the sturdy squires
Guarded their master whilst he drew his sword
Then all the four attacked the stalwart knight.
Count D'Auray fought not well ; shame more than pain
Made his sword heavy and his blows most weak
Whilst rage and joy conspired to nerve Montresse

With more than all his well-known giant strength :
His huge two-handed weapon, whirled like flail
Kept all his four assailants well at bay
Until old Sigbert and his servants, roused
By all this hurlyburly, arming came
To join him in the fray.—

Then Count and squires
O'ermatched, outnumbered, fought their passage out
And strove to get to horse ; scarce had they 'scaped
But that Iachimo, with leopard-spring,
Fastened on Hugh and stabbed him in the back ;
Then in hot haste they mounted and spurred off.

Montresse's wound, tho' deep, yet slowly healed
Beneath the influence of fair Elfrid's care
Who, in mere gratitude for rescue, bent
Her utmost skill to save her rescuer.

“Wound ! who would not be wounded,” thought Sir
Hugh,

With such fair hands to tend, such eyes to shine
With brighter pleasure as my wound doth heal ?
But deeper than stiletto ever pierced
'Those eyes go through and through me like a dart !
Shall I dare ask her healing for that wound ?"

Long time the burly knight, timid in love,
Pondered irresolute.

At length one day—
Choosing, alas ! the least propitious hour—
He thundered out with awkward stammered words
The blundering avowal of his love ;
Poor Elfrid shuddered : deepest gratitude
She owned for his brave rescue ; but then, love
Means not to maiden's heart mere "gratitude" !
Yet how refuse, and why?—

An outer horn
Betokened an arrival ; ere Sir Hugh
Could claim her answer, an approaching step
Brought welcome interruption to his suit ;

'Twas the young knight De Bohun, now in truth
Sent on such errand as Montresse had feigned.

Matilda had not yet left Normandy
But Baldwin Earl of Devon, in the South
Held Exeter and other castles there
On her behoof, and many gallant knights—
Fitzalan, Geoffrey Talbot, Paganel—
Had fled from Stephen and espoused her cause ;
Whilst Adelaïs with her woman's wit
Was plotting for her still at Arundel ;
Meantime King David and the young Scots' prince
With Bruce and Baliol, gath'ring in the North,
Threatened invasion ; making frequent raids
Across the Border : ne'ertheless the King,
Ere setting forth to meet the Northern hosts,
Was coming South to seize on Exeter
And counted on Montresse to meet him there.

The baffled knight could scarce refrain a smile,—

A grim smile much distorted by chagrin,—
To find his “lie” inopportunately “true” !
But forth he must, for now his wound was healed
No longer plea for dalliance might he urge ;
Yet once again, at eventide, he sought
Roughly, abruptly, answer to his suit
From fair Elfrida. And she ? how changed !
That morning, a poor trembling, timid child
An easy prey, it seemed, for any hand
That dared with huntsman’s boldness seize and hold !
This evening, gentle, patient, very kind,
But calmly firm and fixt in clear resolve.

“Forgive me, brave protector ! noble knight !
And oh ! I pray you think me not ingrate
If I do say, as say indeed I must,
I cannot, must not, dare not be your bride !
Oh ! if you love me as you say you do
Ask me no more,—forgive me,—say farewell ! ”

Whence came this courage and this clear resolve ?

Whence? from the talisman of Love's first glance !
Gervase and Elfrid's eyes had met but once,
But in that once an eloquence most sweet—
Most deep, mysteriously musical—
Had wakened harmonies within their souls
Unknown, unfelt, unheard before that glance :
Then maiden resolution roused itself
To that calm bravery that springs from love—
Love, deep, devoted, pure, unselfish love
Eager to show its strength in sacrifice,
Longing to brave all harms, all perils, griefs—
To prove itself more worthy of itself.

Such was the master-passion that assumed
Its first high pow'r in these two bright young hearts—
Brave, bright young hearts, most nobly, fairly matched !

She, the most lovely maiden of that land—
Gentle and meek, yet full of hidden fire—
With deep affections flowing from a source

Whose fountains are in heaven first unsealed.
He, gaily-brave, with strength and grace endowed
With princely visage, not unlike the King's,
But all unclouded yet by manhood's cares
And lighted up by quicker sympathies ;
Chivalric, kindly, gentle to the weak,
An eager champion of the right 'gainst wrong
A knight indeed "sans peur et sans reproche."
His, too, the early prime of manhood's years
When with fresh consciousness of crescent powers
The gaiety of youth commingling still
Oft sparkles out with happy unfeigned mirth ;
And hers the silvern age of sweet seventeen,
When Meditation like a May-day cloud
Would often gather o'er her morning sky
And yet was ever glad to be illumed
By the warm sunshine of bright gaiety.

Pure hearts are aye attracted by pure hearts,
Yet, blinded by their own sweet purity

Each is but conscious that itself doth love
Nor dares to dream its love can be returned.
Thus on the morrow, when the knights set forth,
Elfrid retired to her chamber lone
To weep and muse o'er unrequited love,
Whilst Gervase rode right moodily along
Knowing his own heart pledged and lost for aye
Not dreaming that sweet Elfrid's was his own.
But, with the storm of Battle in the air,
The tramp of archers, clank of knightly steel
And all the spirit-rousing sights and sounds
That stir the blood of warriors on the march,
He roused him and shook off his moodiness ;
Then, as they rode, he questioned Hugh Montresse
Concerning his adventure with D'Auray,
Strange tales of which, much coloured by the Count,
On rumour's wings had buzzed about the court.

With a fierce eagerness and flashing scorn
He listened to the story, bursting in

With "Dastard ! base, dishonourable knight !
How dared the recreant do such deed of shame ?
To break the sacred, ever-sacred laws
Of hospitality were foul enough ;
But to lay hands on that fair tender flower,
That gentle maiden, beautiful as pure,
And pure as angel ;—out on the foul fiend !
I would I had been with thee at that hour ! "

"Ho ! Ho !" thought Hugh Montresse, "so full of
rage,

What may this mean, Sir Gervase de Bohun ?
Have I but beaten off the Count D'Auray
To find a shrewder rival in thyself ? "
And then aloud to him,—

" 'Tis best I tell

That since I rescued Elfrid, by her care
One wound was healed, but by my knightly word
A keener one has struck me to her feet.
Tell me, Gervase, is she not rightly mine ?

I rescued her from peril of deep shame
Yea, risked my life against long odds for her,
And now forsooth my lady doffs me off
With pretty sarsnet speeches and false tears ! ”

De Bohun felt a shock, as tho' from heaven,—
A seventh heav'n of high tho' cloud-hid hope,—
His soul had fallen heavily to earth.
The spider webs of dim perplexity
Confused his sight.

For was it not most true
That Hugh Montresse indeed had earned the right
To claim fair Elfrid—having rescued her ?
Hence it would be a false, unknighly deed
To seek to steal this jewel from his friend :
“ I must not, cannot, strive to do this wrong ”—
He sadly mused as they rode slowly on :
“ But oh ! to see the gates of heaven oped
By that bright angel, whose soft tender eyes
Gazed into mine, as though they fain would say

Arise and win me ! Now, to have those gates
Closed, aye for ever, barred and double-locked
By friendship, honour, knightly faith and troth ! ”

Whilst he thus mused, Montresse in sullen mood
Mistook his silence, and with jealous heat
Broke forth into loud words of rough reproach
Glancing at Elfrid first, then flying wide,
Like ill-shot arrows, hitting Gervase too.

“ Inconstant, fickle women, treach’rous friends !
These are the curses of our knighthood now ;
Time was when friend meant friend, not secret foe—
Out on such hollow-hearted treacheries ! ”

De Bohun flushed ; young manhood brooketh ill
To have its noblest motives wrenched awry
And all misprized : men learn to bear that well
Only at ripest age. When year by year
Hath brought Detraction in all forms and hues

We then detect her, come she how she may,
Smile at her wicked leer, and pass her by
With pity, mingled largely with contempt.

De Bohun flushed, but kept his passion down
And with forced calmness said, "Sir Hugh Montresse,
When have I done to thee or other men
Aught that could breed suspect of treachery?
Keep thy fierce choler for the Count D'Auray
Who, if he 'scape thy vengeful lance, be sure
Shall answer me—aye to the uttermost—
For this foul insult to that ladye fair."
The free, frank pledge, to hold himself aloof
Nor seek to win fair Elfrid from his friend
Was thus checked back by Hugh's ungenerous rage
And changed to hint of future rivalry.

'Tis thus "Suspicion," bungling counsellor!
Doth oft make false, what else had been most true.
Mean-hearted hag! let all men hate thy name!

Thou blight of generous deeds, thou clinging burr,
Fouling the spotless robe of Innocence ;
Thou quarrel-maker, breeder of slow feuds
That grow and grow like toadstools in the dark
Still thriving best on foul and rotten things ;
Thou narrow-visioned monster, whose small eyes
Keen, very sharp, deep-sunken in the head
Gloat over garbage, missing all life's pearls !

Thus the two knights, estranging day by day,
From former friends cooled down to covert foes :
Save for the imminence of larger war
Their passions had blazed forth in instant strife.

The weary siege dragged slowly to its end
And when the foe by thirst was forced to yield,
The King, like fabled Paladin of old,
Allowed his haughty, bitter enemy
To pass unransomed from the castle gates
With leave to go where'er it pleased him best.

Noble, chivalric, but not politic ;
Kings should be made of sterner stuff than this !
Then to fair Normandy he took his arms
And crushed his plotting foes ; anon returned
In triumph to his faithful citizens
And ever-loyal London.

But no rest !

For whilst the King—still harassed and perplex
With widespread treacheries and jealousies
And daily hearing tidings from the North
Of ever-growing powers of the Scots—
Was yearning for the battle, suddenly
Sir Hugh Montresse, with stubborn dogged brows,
Demanded fight *à outrance* with D'Auray ;
And Gervase, hot and hasty with pent rage
Craved after-fight with D'Auray or Montresse.
Wroth was the King ; yet showed not all his wrath,
But spake these words of well-deserved reproof :
“ Rash, thoughtless, foolish warriors, know ye not
That ye and I, and all we hold most dear

In love and honour, stand upon the edge
Of a steep precipice? Why choose this hour
To push each other o'er the beetling cliffs?
Have we not foes enough—ferocious Scots
Thick swarming o'er the borders, laying waste,
And slaying all before them?

Oh, most wise

To cut each other's throats at such a time
And leave your demoiselles to savage kernes!
Is this your vaunted knightly chivalry?
Is this your loyalty to England's King?"

With sullen half-obedience Hugh Montresse
Received the King's rebuke; the Count D'Auray
In haughty acquiescence bent his head;
But Bohun frankly pledged his loyal word
To fight, if need should be, e'en side by side
With these his foes, and aid them faithfully
Until this war was ended;—thus the three
Took each his charge and pre-assigned command.



Part the Fourth.

The King's Dream and a Fire in London.

HARD, hard the task to soothe, persuade re-
strain

And patch up hollow truces 'twixt fierce men
Unreasoning, obstinate, tenacious dull
Blind to all faults committed by themselves
Deaf to all arguments except their own ;
A thankless, hopeless, most heart-weary task ! ”

Oft came at night such thoughts upon the King,
And fain he would have laid his sceptre down
And flung away his crown, but that a “ Voice,”—
Rightly or wrongly,—whispered to his soul
“ Fair England's weal depends upon thine arm

Accept thy destiny ; faint not, oh King ! ”
And clearer, sweeter, as the night grew dark
Rang out that voice with true and tender tone.
The voice of woman, his right-royal Queen
Whose influence cheered all hearts and nerved all
 arms
Whene'er Distress or Danger raised their heads.

Yes, 'tis in woman's power still to bruise
The serpent's head, albeit with wounded heel
And 'tis her pride to set at nought all wounds
If by her love the loved one can be saved.
And with a love unbounded, measureless
She loved her kingly husband,—such a love
As One—the noblest Ladye of our land—
Bore to Her Own in these our later days.

Haughty by birth and nature, full of fire
With grand ambitions kindling in her heart
Yet love so blent with these, and softened down

Their native strength and quick impetuous force
That they but gave her a strange, lustrous grace
Like flame encased in alabaster vase ;
And the fair vase that held this inner flame
Was perfect as the subtlest Grecian art
Had e'er created or could e'er create ;
What wonder then that Stephen thought his Queen
His guardian angel sent by Heaven's grace ?
What wonder that fierce Barons ceased their strife
Whilst she was near, in hall or tented field ?
For oft in tented field that Ladye bright
Companioned her liege lord with fearless heart
Aye, oft with him had crossed the stormy seas
And sate with him in council with his peers
Who else had been as stormy as the seas.

'Twas night in ancient London ; curfew bells
Had tolled the knell of fire ;—blind Darkness rode
Upon his grim black horse through all the streets

Save where priest's taper by a sick man's couch
Glimmered from deep-set casement, or a torch
Borne by a warder, shot a passing ray.
But hark ! a trumpet, and the tramp of horse !
From out the Tower gates a cavalcade
Rides forth torch-lighted, wending to Saint Paul's :
As they approach, far-reaching radiance gleams
From the vast windows and wide-opened doors
And following, as wakened by the light,
The pealing Anthem's voice came rolling forth
Filling the vacant darkness ;—then the chaunt
Of Miserere Domine rose high
With plaintive tones appealing to High Heaven
For pity and for pardon for the earth.

'Twas the King's vesper-mass ere setting forth
To conquer or be conquered by the Scot.

A grand array of nobles, knights, and monks
Ladies and pages, archers, men-at-arms

Were gathered 'neath the ancient Gothic roof
With thoughts and prayers as varied as their garb.
The Queen with wordless yearnings for the weal
And safety of the idol of her heart
Knelt, soul-absorbed, before the holy shrine :
“ Ambition ” prayed for power or revenge,—
“ Love ” whispered to her saint her brave knight's
 name
With blush on cheek and downcast tearful eye,—
Whiles he, with bated breath, repeated hers
And called Heaven's witness to his constancy.
The solemn priests, with half-mechanical
Soul-weary repetition, muttered prayers.
But Stephen's rose—albeit in warrior's phrase—
Straight from the King, unto the King of kings :

“ Oh, God of Battles, and great Lord of Hosts,
If that my reign be good for England's weal
Strengthen mine arm, and sternly string my heart
That it may bend all wills like stubborn bows

To one great aim—their country. Teach the King
How to subdue the factious, soothe the fierce,
Restrain oppression, and protect the weak ;
How to give unity of thought and deed
To all my headstrong nobles, and maintain
Peace in the camp and courage in the field.

I crave not life for life itself, Great Lord,
But to fulfil my devoir like a King ;
If in Thy high decree I must pass hence
Now in the hour of this my manhood's prime
I bow me humbly.

Save for her, my Queen,

I could pass gaily thro' the gates of death ;
For her, I fain would live ; yet not for her
Would I outlive mine honour for an hour
For living thus, I should outlive her love,—
That love so deep, so fervent ;—Gracious Lord,
In mercy grant our oft-repeated prayers
That we may pass together from this world !

Vengeance is Thine ; strengthen my warrior sons
That if we fall, they shall avenge our fall.
Whate'er our fate or theirs, Great God preserve
Our noble Engand ! Would that I might see
What fate awaits her in the coming years !"

E'en as he spake, the monks commenced their chaunt
And on the clouds of sound his soul went forth
And hovered down the coming centuries.

It passed from Paul's to Canterbury's shrine
And saw relentless, coward murderers
Strike down and slay an old defenceless man ;
And watching still, he marked a haughty King
In penance scourged by monks before that shrine.

It floated o'er the ocean, and away
To gorgeous Palestine, and there beheld
The grandest warrior of the Norman race
In combat with the swarthy Saracen

Do deeds of valour, wellnigh fabulous ;
Thence it returned to Runnymede's fair field
Where sate crowned Craft, outwitted and o'ermatched—
Surrounded by fierce Barons in strange arms
With angry brows, and hands on half-drawn swords.
It saw the baffled monarch seize and sign
And thrust aside the parchment with an oath.

Then many warrior kings went sternly by
With varied fortunes,—reigned, and fought, and died ;
Thus each in warrior-fashion building up
The fame of England's courage and renown—
Climaxed by one, who with a dauntless band
Broke thro' o'erwhelming powers of countless hosts
And reigned in France and England, Lord of both.

But like a brilliant meteor this one passed ;
And then dread sights and sounds of civil war
Raged with mad Passion's whirlwind thro' the land
And left it bleeding, torn, and desolate.

A calm succeeded,—an exhausted calm ;
Till, by bright glare of triumph blinded, dazed,
A sensual tyrant plunged to lust thro' blood.

A short sweet strain like to a choral chaunt
Rang out a requiem at the tyrant's death ;
But soon, alas ! came tyranny once more
Spurred into madness by the bigot's rage
And tongues of fire told the cow'ring world
And list'ning Heavens of the "martyr's" faith !

Now, like the fabled bird, from out those flames
Rose England to her zenith—sternly strong.
A brave imperious Queen, with royal pride,
Curbed and controlled the factions of the State,—
Held passions like fierce bloodhounds in the leash,—
Roused and encouraged noble enterprize,—
And rode, like Una, on the Lion-Realm.
Her dauntless sailors battled with the waves
And, aided by the winds, beat bravely back

The dread invasion from her threat'ned shores ;
Her soldiers carried conquest on their swords ;
Chivalric courage graced the tented field—
Wisdom—the council ; reverence—the throne.

But high above all powers of court and camp
“ Genius ” arose—and with its magic wand
Summoned up spirits from the wondrous Past,
Broke the else deathlike silence of the tomb,
Embodied forth the forms of things unknown,
Illumined hearts, gave tongues of fire and flame
To deeds heroic and to noblest thoughts
And cast this splendid glamour of bright light
Far o'er the waters of the coming days !

Then blew a chill wind from the icy North
And froze the land to sluggish apathy.

Imperious Weakness followed, wak'ning Strife
To rugged bold resistance ; men grew fierce,

And banded 'gainst each other,—warring wide,—
Until the luckless, faithless royal cause
Of this great desolation bowed his neck
Beneath the headsman's axe.

Then slowly rose
The grim Dictator, who with iron hand
Fought for fair "Liberty," and won her well—
But, in the very hour of victory,
Stabbed her—like Iphigenia—to the heart.
Yet England stood erect in his stern strength
And made the nations tremble at his word.

Death touched the despot, and the iron grip
Released its hold ; but in that hour down fell
The honour and the power of the land.
"Debauch"—that shallow mockery of "Joy"—
Ran riot with wild tipsy revelry ;
Corrupted courtiers and worse courtezans,
Having no honour of their own to sell,
Betrayed their country's, for a paltry bribe ;

Lords of misrule reigned high above the King
Who played but silly antics on his throne
And grinned, with shallow jests, beneath his crown.

King Jester died ; and gloomy Bigotry
Was quietly diserowned, and driven forth
To play at persecution in strange lands—
Whilst brave, calm Wisdom reigned, and held its own
Despite proud France and wide-leagued Germany.

Then the long vision of the Kings and Queens
Began to lose distinctness,—broader grew
And clearer in the foreground came and went
Shadows of statesmen, potent warriors,—
And mystic Powers spreading tho' the earth
Rising in air and speeding o'er the seas.
Strange lights, like million stars, illumed the night
Through cities that had slowly far outstretched
Their lines of palaces mile beyond mile
Into the erst-while quiet country fields.

The roar of traffic on ten thousand wheels
Rolled with a heavy soul-bewildering noise
Scarce ceasing night or day ; whilst here and there
Swift-darting, monstrous dragons with red eyes
Belching forth fiery vapours rushed at speed
Crashing with hideous and discordant screams
Over the roofs of houses, swimming streams
And plunging headlong into blackest caves
With yells of anguish at approaching doom.

Where vast primeval forests once had grown,
There 'neath a black funereal canopy
Flame held its lurid carnival of Fire ;
Swart sons of Tubal-Cain and Vulcan smote
With huge Titanic hammers on a mass
Of blinding red-hot iron, till the sparks
Fell thick and far and wide in fiery rain
Then, by some subtle demon wielded, wrought
The shapeless mass assumed a monstrous form
Of vast proportions ; by a touch uplift

And placed in an embrasure, lo! the Form
Sent forth such dreadful thunder, with a blaze
Of lightning so' appalling, that the King—
E'en in the spirit—shuddered ; then he saw
That a huge thunderbolt had issued forth
From this strange Form, and hurtling thro' the air
Had struck upon a vast Leviathan
Half whale, half ship, with iron coat of mail
Slow floating, like an island, far away :
Then back replied the black Leviathan
With blinding flash, soon followed by the roar
Of the ear-splitting thunder ; crash ~~on~~ crash,
Fast, fierce, and furious raged the horrid war,—
For this, was " Battle " in the ~~days~~ to come !

Meanwhile another lightning, silent, swift
Carried man's lightest words, ~~most~~ trivial thoughts
Over the mountains, down thro' ocean's depths
From land to land, thus girdling the whole earth
With fairy rings of knowledge.

High in air
Floated dark globes wind-driven, swift as wind,
From which a pendant, like a cockle-shell,
Seemed to contain some creatures like to men
But dwarfed and dwindled into moving specks.

Then the King's spirit, wearied of its quest,
Returned to seek the body.

Stephen rose
To hear the last tone of the solemn chaunt—
Whose first had freed his spirit for its flight.

Huge waxen candles borne out to the night
And flaring torches, casting light and shade,
Revealed the ancient city as it slept ;
With that strange dream still hov'ring in his brain
How shrunken, weird, and wild that city looked !
Scarce knew the King if now he dreamed or then ;
Strange seemed its wooden houses, rudely carved,
Its quaint devices, swinging to and fro

On rusty hinges, skirling at the wind ;
How mean and dark and narrow were the streets,
Through which wound forth the white and black hood
monks

And hierarchs, in vestments red and gold
Incense and relic bearers, crosiers, cross
And all the gorgeous priestly panoply.
But when the bright lights flashed on coats of mail,
On polished corselet and well-burnished helm,
On lance and banner, battleaxe and sword—
Then the King's blood came back with a great
bound,
Again he knew himself a warrior pledged
To guard a kingdom, or to lose a crown.

Not his the mind to give the rein to dream—
He thought in visions, but he lived in acts.

Mounting their palfreys, Stephen and his Queen
Attended by the knights, rode slowly back

and vanished thro' the Tower's gloomy gates
spectres; and black Darkness reigned supreme.

Once again on that eventful night
the Fire unfurled his banner of revolt
sunningly he came, by covert ways;
in a low, mean house, where brawling knaves
own a cellar gambled, drank and fought;
he returned lantern fell on heaped-up straw
and fire, like a demon loosed from hell,
rang from the earth with crackling laughter wild;
prussing thence, it chased the drunken rogues
rough floor and casement out into the street,
and then burst through with aye-increasing pow'r
oor after floor, until with pointed flames
shot defiance at heaven thro' the roof.
ash and the blazing timbers falling down
to the greedy all-consuming maw
of the destroying demon who, by food
add still more ravenous, ragged out and seized

Another and another house in turn
With ever-growing swiftness ; soon the street
Was all ablaze,—from upper rooms outleapt
The flame resistless, till a dreadful arch—
A bridge of fire thrown from house to house—
Spanned o'er the narrow causeway and swept on
To right or left extending—as the wind
Veering and shifting wildly, lent its aid.

The King, uproused by warders, climbed a tower
From whence he best could mark the fiery path
Of this Destroyer, and from thence direct
How to head back and check its dreadful course.
Knights, archers, nobles, pages, men-at-arms
Moved by one common impulse, hurried forth
And in obedience to the King's command
Cleared round the Tower walls a vacant space ;
Then from the moat they formed long living chains
And sent the water out to meet its foe.

Like to a tiger baffled in its spring,
The demon crouched and fled another way,
And fiercer for the check it seemed to rage
Devouring all before it ;—then the King
In haste descending,—passed the word along
That all should follow him as best they might
By river up the stream to guard Saint Paul's ;
Out sped the Royal barge with King and knights
And soon the darkling river seemed alive
With motley crews all straining at their oars ;
A race with fire !—a race with life and death !
Up thro' the narrow arches of the bridge
The sturdy oarsmen sent their boats at speed
The Fire-racing with them on the shore ;
Soon they outstripped their foe, and landing near
The grand cathedral plied axe, crow and bar,
To clear a space around it.

Well they strove !

Shoulder to shoulder, King and commoner
Comrades in common danger !—well they strove

And once again the hungry tiger reared
With flaming mane and blood-red open mouth
Then slowly cowered back upon its path
Spurning the red-hot embers as it died.

Conquered ! subdued !—the grand cathedral saved !
But ah ! what sight of Desolation dawned
Upon King Stephen's eyes when chill grey Morn
Came creeping up the river clad in mist
To look at the disasters of the night !
Full twice three hundred houses burnt and wrecked—
Thousands of wretched creatures dispossessed
For ever from the homes they loved so well ;—
And many, with worse bitterness, who mourned
In hopeless grief for parent, child, or wife !

Sadly King Stephen strode adown the streets
Amid the ruins tow'rd the water-side,
Pond'ring half-dreamily if this might be
The first step tow'rd fulfilment of his dream—

If from these ashes there would now arise
The palaces he saw in that strange trance?
Or was his Royal city thus destroyed
Because he had despised it? Sore his heart
At this last thought, and hungrily it yearned
To see once more the quaint old houses safe
With all their happy inmates still unharmed.
Musing thus sadly, he regained his barge—
And then was roughly wakened to fresh grief;
For lo! the stealthy demon Fire had changed,
Protean-like, from tiger to a snake.
And crawled thro' smould'ring ashes to the bridge—
There, once again, sprang high into the air
Tearing and roaring with its tongues of flame
Destroying all before it as it passed.

The boatmen held the barge back with their oars
Lest the far-darting fiery shower should fall
And jeopardize the King,—but, on command,
They slowly, cautiously approached the scene

To seek and rescue those who clambered down
The slippery piers and trusted to the wave—
Rather than perish by the rushing fire.
A dread alternative!—the rushing stream
Devoured its victims swiftly!—but some few,
The hardier, stronger swimmers, stemmed the waves
And clinging to the barge were lifted in.

Not long the fight that puny man maintains
Against two fierce and raging elements—
His life is tossed like smoke into the air,
Or, like a bubble, on the water bursts!
And yet how long it seemed to the King,—
Resting thus uselessly upon the stream,—
Ere the vast timbers of the wooden bridge
Had burnt and burnt down to the water's edge.
Whilst watching sadly thus the strange mad war
Between the rivals—Fire seemed to gleam
With mocking faces and sharp crackling laugh
As though 'twould tell him—"Monarch as he was,

He had no power to punish or control
The fell Destroyer, by a clown let loose !”

But all things have an end : the Demon crawled
Down to the river's level and expired ;
Whilst lurid smoke, obscuring Heaven's light,
Banished the morning and turned noon to night.

Late eventide,—the weary heart-sick King
Passed at much peril thro' the blackened piles
And landed, sadly, at his Tower gate.

How sweet the love of woman,—when Distress
And fierce Disaster, like two caitiff knights,
Take us un'wares and strike us to our knees !
The gentle voice so softly musical,
The dove-like eyes still smiling thro' their tears,
The tender hand smoothing the fever'd brow,
And soothing with its cool and silken touch
The throbbing pulses and the o'erstrained nerve !

Oh ! such a love is like the sweet cool breeze
Of summer evening after sultry heats
Through which, half-maddened by the ceaseless glare,
We yet have fought our battles out like men ;
Or like a fountain in a dried-up land
Wherein we long have wandered parched with thirst ;
Or like the first glimpse of a lovely isle
To shipwrecked mariners when spent with toil ;
Or like a breath from Heav'n, in mercy sent,
To lift our fainting spirits from the dust !
And such a love found Stephen from his Queen !

All night, all day the Royal Ladye sent
Her trusty messengers to succour those
Whose need was sorest in those fearful hours ;
And many trembling children, orphaned maids,
Maimed men, and widowed mothers sought and found
Kind help and shelter in the dreaded Tower.
But now her one and all-absorbing aim
Was to console her weary heart-sore lord

With tender words and loving sympathy.
Thus Love and Sleep together worked their charm
And drew their gentle spells around the King.
But she, next morning with the earliest dawn,
Companioned by her pages and her maids
Herself went forth afoot to seek and save
Those who might else still perish in distress.

Yes! like an angel, clad in spotless robe,
With brightly flashing diadem on brow
That whoso looked on it might hope and live—
Thus, through black ruin, that made Earth seem Hell,
Passing with firm and fearless steps, she went—
Despite all dangers from the smould'ring fires
Or tott'ring beams still hanging high in air :
And freshly, like a messenger of hope,
Returned she to the Council-board at noon
With Sorrow changed to Gladness in her train.

Now this disaster, it was well foreseen,

Would but draw on the Northern dogs of war
To ravage still more fiercely ; hence the King
Assigned his brother Winchester the task
Of rousing the burnt city from its swoon
Whilst he and his stern warriors took the field.





Part the Fifth.

The Queen's Ride to York.

SUCH part of London as was still unscathed
For many days was now astir with noise :
The neigh of horses and the clank of arms
Rang far and wide thro' all its thoroughfares ;
The armourers' forges and the fletchers' shops
Were thronged with yeomen, archers, men-at-arms
Impatient to be furnished for the march.
Oft from the noisy group a doggrel song
Trolled by some loud-voiced varlet rattled out,
And if the chorus pleased, 'twas taken up
And echoed by a dozen sturdy knaves.
Ranoulf—who loved to hear the bowstring twang
Better than love-sick lute in ladye's bower—

Had strung some coarse words to a soldier's tune
Which touched a key-note in the common heart,
And thus 'twas shouted forth in man's gruff tones,—
Carolled by laughing women,—skreeled by boys.

“ King Davy the Scot, with a ragged lot
Of red-haired kernes at his back,
Has crossed the Border, the bold marauder,
To burn and murder and sack.
So boot and saddle, bring bow and lance,
Hurrah for the roar of battle !
We're away to teach the Scots to dance,
And to keep 'hands off' from our cattle.

With the prick of the lance, we'll make them dance
To the bow-string's merry tune,—
Over the Border we'll drive the marauder
To dance by the light of the moon—
So boot and saddle, bring bow and lance,
Hurrah for the roar of battle !
We're away to teach the Scots to dance,
And to keep 'hands off' from our cattle.

Donald and Mac, you'll have to go back,
Or stay an' ye will, and be shot—
Over the Border we'll drive the marauder,
The beggarly bare-legged Scot.
So boot and saddle, bring bow and lance,
Hurrah for the roar of battle !
We're away to teach the Scots to dance,
And to keep ' hands off ' from our cattle."

ing Stephen smiled to hear this doggrel sung,
ut well he knew the stalwart Highland men
ed by the flower of Scottish chivalry
/ith knights of France and England in the camp
/ere not the foes to scoff at, or misprize ;
fence,—after many days of warlike toil,
nd ample preparation,—came the morn
/hen bright eyes much bedimmed by morning dews
ooked wistfully to watch their knights depart.

" Oh, tears, distressful tears, there is no spot
Where Love with woman dwelt
Where ye are not.

Oh, lonely yearning heart by partings torn,
Where Love with woman dwelt
 There,—you must mourn.

Oh, burning, aching, and bewildered brain,
Where Love with woman dwelt
 Thou must remain.

Oh, soft hands clasped in meek and mute despair,
Where Love with woman dwelt,
 Ye too are there."

Thus mourned a gentle maiden to her lute
As in the gloaming of the falling eve
She pondered sadly of her absent love.

True were her words, yet scarcely all the truth !
There's not a casement in a thousand homes
Through which a woman's sigh hath not passed out
And left her vainly struggling with strong grief.
There is no age where partings have not been ;—
No time so dimly ancient and remote
Wherein Love's lips have not said sad " farewells "—

Love's hands clasped softly with the last fond touch—
Love's drooping eyelids closed o'er burning tears !
Oh tears, distressful tears, ye are indeed
The woman's heritage bequeathed by Eve
To all her daughters till the end of Time !

The trumpets rang, and forth in stern array
Troop after troop defiling thro' the gates
Took by three ways their northward-tending routes.
With one of these three armies went D'Auray
Eustace Bretagne, and twice ten thousand men ;
With one, the Lord of Arlon, and Montresse ;—
But with the third, went Stephen and his Queen
Edgar the Saxon, Gervase de Bohun
And many noble lords and gallant knights.
'Twas purposed all should rendezvous at York
From whence had come by latest messenger
Good tidings of a gathering in the North
To hold the fierce marauding Scots at bay
Until the King should come.

But by ill hap
The castles held by foes, or worse, "false friends,"
Delayed the march, and sorely chafed the King.
He dared not pass and leave them unsubdued
For then their garrisons swift swooping out
Would harass him and hang upon his rear
Like kites and vultures.

Meantime messengers
Came hotly spurring in from farther North
To say the gathering grew daily strong
But urging haste of aids e'en tho' such aids
Were less in numbers. Thereupon the King,
Yielding to strong persuasion of his peers,
Forewent all hope of battle for himself,
Since the King's name oft opened castle gates
Else held 'gainst lesser leaders in mere pride :
Thus after stormy counsel 'twas decreed
That Gervase with a band of chosen knights
Should meet Lord Arlon, Bretagne, and D'Auray,
And take the King's commands.

Then spake the Queen :

" Let me now go with these ; a woman's arm
Though weak in battle, oft makes others strong ;
A woman's voice, though very soft and low
Oft calms dissension and enforceth peace
Where harsh authority would waken strife :
Persuasion is the power of the weak—
Let me persuade thee Stephen, husband ! king !
My name will rally to the battle all
Who hold true knighthood and high chivalry ;
My name and my known presence in the field
Will make the battle like a tournament
And knights will do or die if I am there—
Say I not well, Sir Gervase, is't not so ? "

" My gracious Queen, had I a thousand lives,
And each more precious than the one I own,
I would give all,—yea die a thousand times
In thy defence."

" Believe ye that, my liege ? "

"Yea, I believe," said Stephen ; " But, my Queen,
Can I, a knight—a king—ignobly stay
To parley with, and crush these meaner foes
And send the dearest ladye of the land
To risk the grander battle? By my sword
I swear I cannot do so mean a deed !"

"Oh King ! there is more courage needed here
To drive these traitors from their guarded lairs
Than in one open battle ; thou hast met
And conquered danger in too many wars
To fear One Battle for thyself or me !
Fear not for me ; thy gallant knights will form
A wall of steel to shield me where I go—
Then let me forth to cheer them to this war."

The King reluctantly gave slow consent ;
Then, when De Bohun and his royal charge
Set forward on the morrow, Stephen ranged
With swifter eagerness from siege to siege

Hurling his waves of onset up the rocks
With brave, impetuous, overwhelming rush.

In one of these fierce onslaughts, when at eve
The central tower yielded to assault,
High in that tower sate a ladye fair ;
Pale but undaunted sate, with queenly brow,
Flashing, unflinching, proud imperious eyes
And a firm mouth that, ere it opened, spoke
Of the strong will accustomed to command.
Hence when the knights burst in the chamber door
They drooped their swords and paused.

Calmly she spake

As one inured to dangers :

“Sirs, I hear

Ye are King Stephen's warriors ; is it so ? ”

“Ladye, we are.”

“Then lead me to the King.”

Like vassals, they obeyed instinctively
Her simple mandate. Stephen rose to meet
The noble captive, and with wonder saw
Bretagne's fair bride, the daughter of Count Eu.

Her tale was briefly told ;—her father dead,
The nearest kinsman of their house had brought
The orphaned daughter to this eagle's nest
Far inland from the Castle by the Sea ;
But now, this eagle's eyrie being ta'en
And her rough guardian slain in the defence,
Maud proudly claimed protection from the King.

A wistful glance she cast around her then
Hoping in truth that Eustace might be near
To change that claim for higher, dearer claim ;
The blush of disappointment and drooped eyes
Were not unnoticed by the kindly King,
Who with chivalric courtesy and grace
Welcomed the ladye to his queenless camp

And had her tended royally ; nor failed
To give her tidings of the northern war
Wherein Bretagne's name sounded more than once,
Made musical by tones of generous praise.

At each such sound Maud's brave heart beat with pride,
Her pale cheek flushed and brighter shone her eyes.

No sweeter music to a woman's ear
Than words of praise bestowed on one she loves ;
No gift more royal in the whole wide world
Than words of praise ungrudgingly bestowed !
A gift thrice blessed ; it giveth to the knight—
Fighting his monarch's battle—courage, hope ;
It giveth to the ladye of his love
Such joy as angels feel in man's good deeds ;
It giveth to the gen'rous giver back
Kindlier sympathies with all things pure,
Deep, clearer insight into all things true,
And larger love for all things beautiful !

What wonder then if these two, thus attuned
By interpenetrating sympathies,
Should hold fair converse far into the night ?

The King and captive sate in banquet hall
At the high table, separate, aloof
From the rough hungry feasters gathered there—
Careless, unconscious of the whispered jests
That flew like foam across the lower hall.

To him—now sometime parted from his Queen
And all his knights save the mere men of war
In whose fierce natures he had scant delight,—
Her presence and the sweet instinctive grace
Of high-bred woman in her place of power
Was like a burst of moonlight after storm ;
So softly, delicately luminous
Shining on thoughts long-hidden in his heart—
Revealing newer beauties in her own—
She seemed like a fair sister of his Queen.

And she? oh she ! perchance but for that Queen,
And her own deep and never-failing love
For Eustace de Bretagne,—it might have been
That she, perforce, had loved the noble King.

Doubtless the coarser natures, looking up
From lower places, grinned with cunning thoughts
To see the earnest converse of these twain—
But their fair guardian angels, looking down,
Smiled, with a fearless prescience, knowing well
How Love may live with perfect Purity.

Only one gleam of moonlight might it be
And then once more the whirl of drifting storms.

A queenless camp for ever on the march
Was no fit place for gentle demoiselle ;
Hence, on the morrow, with sufficient guard
Led by an ancient Baron, Maud set forth
Tow'rd London,—safest refuge for the weak.

Meantime the fair Queen and her gallant knights
Rode gaily forward tow'rd the frowning North
Cheered as they went by frequent messengers
Each with some tale of valour to recount ;—
For one brought word how well the brave old knigl
Walter l'Espeç, with forty men-at-arms
And threescore archers, held the bridge of Scars
Against a swarming host of savage kernes :
Another told how noble Albemarle
Had beaten back the Bruce and Baliol
And at the head of some three hundred knights
Dashed like a thunder-cloud right thro' the ranks
Of the opposing army of the Scots
And wheeling swiftly brought his warriors back
With no more loss than twenty in the fray.

Such tales as these set all the knights a-fire
With hot impatience to be lance to lance
And sword to sword against the hated foes.
But for the Queen, certes they had spurred on

So rashly as to reach the place of tryst—
Both man and horse unfit for battle's shock ;
But she—pretending politic fatigue—
Controlled them, without seeming to control :
Oft at their halts, which else seemed far too long,
She with her woman's wit beguiled the time
By laying on each knight in turn, command
To give some record of his ladye-love—
Where seen at first ? how woo'd ? how won ? if
won.

Many with soldiers' bluntness straight avowed
"They had no sovereign ladye save the Queen !"
Whereat the Queen would laughingly reply,
"Have I no ladies then around my throne
Worthy your highness' notice ? oh, sir knight,
Your lance will fail, your sword will lack its edge,
Until you have some loved one to defend !"
Others essayed to tell their tale in rhyme,
After the fashion of the troubadour.

Albeit unskilled and mournful in its lay,
 This, out of many, pleased the Queen the best
 'Twas told by Bertrand, young De Bohun's fri
 And thus the story of his sad love ran :—

“ Oh, she was fair to see—the wild rose bloom
 Mingled with hawthorn whiteness on her che
 Too fair, alas ! her loveliness my doom !
 The fate of mortals who an angel seek.

Oh, she was fair to see—a soft blue eye
 That now flashed brightly, now was dewed wi
 That brightness raised my young hopes to th
 Only to dash them down midst sighs and fea

Oh, she was fair to see—and for a while
 Gently and kindly she regarded me,—
 Guerdoned my true devotion with her smile
 Until in highest heaven I seemed to be.

Oh, she was fair to see—but Death passed by
 And saw and seized her in her maiden bloon
 For her I lived, for her I fain would die,
 For love lies dead beside her in the tomb !”

“Nor seek, nor yet avoid thy death, young knight !
All honour to thy noble constancy,
But if thou wouldst be worthy to rejoin
Thy love in that bright region of the blest
Where Love for ever triumphs over Death,—
Hold life as God's great gift to thee in feoff
Wherewith thou canst do largely to amend
What else were wrong in others or thyself :
Or think of life as Earth's grand tournament
Where high above the turmoil and the strife
In spotless robe and amaranthine crown
Thy Queen of Beauty gazing on thee sits :
Still, still her eyes will brighten, her cheek flush
When she beholds thee, her true faithful knight,
With stainless shield and lance set well in rest
With prayer on lip and courage in thy heart,
Rescue the weak and strike Oppression low !

But if in dull and spiritless despair
Thou fling'st away thy life with all its powers—

The laurel she holds forth with hope to place
On thy loved brow when all the fight is o'er—
Will be awarded to a nobler knight
And thou, with shame, must pass her by uncrownèd

“Dear Sovereign Ladye, at thy high command
Henceforth I will endeavour by God's grace
So to regard my life as yet of use
And so to use it that I be not shamed
To meet the sainted angel of my love :
Devoted to thy safety first 'tis pledged
And after, to the King's and England's weal.”

“Sir Knight, the land, the King, and we ourselves
Have still sore need of true and loyal lives—
Henceforth be brave, but never-more despair.”

Then some days hence the Queen and her array
Drew rein before York walls.

A herald sent
Announced her coming ; forth from out the gates
A gallant cavalcade came spurring on
Armed to the teeth in panoply of war,
For war was imminent ;—scouts had returned
Bringing large tidings of a swarming host
Wide-spreading, scarce restrained, still flooding in
Southward and eastward, like a surging wave,
Destroying all before it in its course.

D'Auray, Bretagne, Lord Arlon, Hugh Montresse,—
Companioned now by gallant Albemarle
And the brave grey-haired veteran, grand L'Espece,—
Had joined their forces, and were well prepared
To breast and beat back this insurging wave.

Great was their joy to greet their noble Queen
And through the town and out to distant camps
“The Queen ! the Queen !” resounded far afield—

Until the gaping villein at his plough,—
Still ploughing doggedly, with scanty hope
Of reaping aught of harvest,—stood and stared
And erst took up the cry, “The Queen! the Queen

A thousand hearts beat high 'neath coats of mail
Eager to show by brave chivalric deeds
Their deep devotion to that lovely Queen!
So bright her eyes, so sweet the mantling flush
Of gladsome graciousness that came and went
Upon her soft cheek as with kindling smiles
She bent in recognition of the shouts,
The cheers, the joyous welcomes! On she rode
Upon a gallant war-horse, which with pride—
Shaking the waving glory of his mane
And trumpeting defiance to the winds—
Carried his royal mistress thro' the crowd
With lofty grandeur and superb disdain.
His the disdain,—hers, the heart-winning glance
Of sweet mute thanks too deep and full for words.

Thus, to the Minster passing, Queen and lords
Knelt with full hearts of gratitude and hope
And rose with benedictions on their heads.

The staunch Archbishop York,—whose loyal zeal
Despite great age and sore infirmities
Had holpen much to gather this great power,—
Fore-counselled the construction of a car
Like to a ship on wheels, whose tap'ring mast
Should bear on high a standard with the Cross
And precious relics,—holy sacraments—
With consecrated banners placed below.
Upon these relics, and beneath the Cross,
The knights had sworn to guard this with their lives ;
Hence when at council it was now resolved
To issue forth and battle with the Scots
At Cuten Moor, this car went with the host.





Part the Sixth.

The Battle.

BLACK was the eve of battle ;—thunder clouds
Gathered in lurid masses in the north,
And silent lightnings shot forked arrows down
Splitting thro' murky darkness as they fell ;
Then the dull thunder muttered far away
On Scotland's border-mountains, and passed by
Leaving an awful silence in the world—
A breathless silence,—presage of the storm.

But hark ! upon the silence breaks the drum
And the shrill trumpet sends forth quick commands ;
Footfall of spearmen and the heavy tread
Of great war-horses at a slow-paced walk
Come next upon the ear, with sounds that grow

From a mere strange vibration in the air,
Until the loud but measured rhythmic beat
Of thirty thousand warriors on the march
Makes the earth tremble with foreboding thrills.

Well might she tremble ! gentle mother Earth !
Who fain would give to all her wayward sons
Enough, and plenty for their happiness
If each with plenty would but be content !

As thus the English power passed along
To take its vantage-ground on Cuton Moor,
Some few remembered that this dreary waste—
This barren melancholy wilderness
With jungles of wild bramble, stunted shrubs,
Coarse rushes, tangled ferns and weeds bespread,—
Had, e'er the grim harsh Conqueror's decree,
Been once with corn-fields and soft pastures clad.
He,—in revenge of treach'rous Baron's deeds,
Wreaked his blind vengeance and unreasoning wrath

Upon the homes and lands of husbandmen,
Destroying flock and herd and corn and farm
E'en to the burning of the plough and spade.

Thence followed ten years' famine thro' the land ;
The wretched outcasts perished in slow want
By thousands upon thousands ;—first the weak,
The sickly, and the aged ;—children next,
With sunken cheeks, pale lips and starting eyes
Aching with hunger—famishing for food—
Crawled to the woods, and eating garbage,—died.
Then the strong men whose only use of strength
Was mere prolonging of lean Famine's pangs
Died under hedgerows or in ditch or pool,
With only breath enow to leave a curse
On the fierce despot—feasting far away
With lavish waste and reckless revelry.

To some who bitterly recalled those days
It seemed as if the curse were clinging still

To that drear scene of horrent misery ;—
For as the clouds brake sullenly low down,
Like a black mountain chasmed at its base
And splitting to let forth volcanic flames,
The angry rays of the down-sinking sun
Truck with red glare upon the dull low hills
And streamed like blood and fire o'er the plain ;
They lit on helm and hauberk, shield and lance
And gave a glamour to the faces stern
Of those who turned to watch that sun go down—
Flush like battle-anger, hot and red
Fore-casting carnage with its dying light :
But ere it passed for ever from the eyes
Of many a gallant knight who never more
Could see the sun set on this lower world,
Touched with parting ray the high-placed cross
And threw its mystic shadow on their hearts.

The black rock slowly closed, and deep'ning gloom
Broad ghostly pallor o'er the wasted land.

A land of Desolation,—moaning winds
Arose, swept over it, and howling fled—
As if in fear of hearing yet again
The groans and curses of slow-starving men.
Chill mists came creeping forth like sheeted ghosts
The restless spectres of th' unburied dead,
And clasped the trunks of solitary trees
Which in the gloaming seemed like hideous dwarfs
With huge grotesque, distorted, stunted heads.
Not long the battle between ghosts and dwarfs,
For soon the spectres spread from tree to tree
Until they formed a wide encroaching lake
Which, drowning all things in its silent depths,
Sent a cold shudder to the stoutest hearts.
Aye e'en the burly warrior Albemarle
And huge Montresse and Arlon felt the chill
Strike through their armour like a foeman's shaft ;
But soon the soldier's crackling camp-fires blazed
The guard was set, and welcome food and wine
Refreshed them as they rested on their arms.

The Count D'Auray, by restless spirit stirred
Or led by some attraction, strong but vague,
Vandered forth dreamily from fire to fire
Marking with feverish insight of the brain
The sights and sounds that hovered in the air;
He seemed to see with more than mortal sight
Each hard stern visage of the men of war
Distinct and vividly as cut in bronze ;
Each varying emotion as it passed
Across their features, as they laughed or sang
Or wrangled, boasted, gambled, dozed or dreamed,
With the red-flashing fire and dusky smoke
Basting their flickerings of light and shade
Upon their faces, seemed to him revealed
With such strange intuition, that he knew,
Long ere the speaker spoke, what word would come.

He seemed with full distinctness to foreknow
Who 'mongst these groups of reckless warriors
Would perish in the coming battle-field,

For over such, the wild fantastic smoke
Gathered, and mirrored them high up in air ;
Either recumbent with stark-staring eyes,
Or fallen sideways on a broken sword,
Or crushed, half-hidden by a fallen foe.

The air seemed full of weird-like shapes like these ;
And far off, like the voices in a shell,
Came all the well-known sounds and cries of war.
Long time he wandered thus thro' all the host,
Heedless of time, and yet with prescient thought
That time for him was numbered now by hours.

He could not see Death's image of himself
But felt it hanging o'er him like a pall
And thus Despair in rugged accents mourned :

“ Night comes at last ! thy day of life is done ;
Night, darkest night ! thy race on earth is run.
What ‘hath-been,’ now, for thee, is evermore,—
Thy choice of good or ill for aye is o'er.

Oh, night, black night! com'st thou with fearful
dreams,

Faces of anguish, wretched victims' screams?
Will all my crimes, like poison-serpents, rise
To dart fierce horrors thro' my lidless eyes?

Night comes at last—thy life-long dreaded fate
Not to be warded off by pride or hate;
Craft in the council, courage in the fight,
Shrivel and wither at the coming night!

Night comes at last! but Battle cometh first!
Avaunt chill Terror! sink weak Fear accurst!
Hark! in the air the trumpet and the drums
Welcome red day of Battle 'ere night comes!"

His ear, o'erstrung by strain of strong despair
Heard thus—or seemed to hear—far, far away
The first faint signals of the Queen's approach;
For she, with Gervase, Bertrand, and their knights
Set forward with the early hour of morn
To join the English host at Cuton Moor.

The cold grey morning met them on the road
But with such misty, dim, and baffling light
That only by the torches of their guides
Could they descry their road ; thus hindered sore,
It chanced that a band of Scottish knights
Losing their way or led by treachery,
Scarce three spears off came riding thro' the mist
Liker to phantom warriors than mere men.
A crash of lances,—shouts and cries and groans
Told of the sudden mêlée ; then the rush
Of swift retreating foemen left all still,
Save for the voice of one in deadly pain
Unhorsed, and lying at the fair Queen's feet.

'Twas Bertrand, who alone in that wild shock
Of dream-like fray had taken his death wound ;

Whilst Gervase knelt and strove to staunch the blood,
Bertrand in broken faltering accents spake,
“ I sought not Death, oh Queen !—he came to me ;

not sin that now I welcome him—
in defending thee I joy to die—
I have saved my Queen, and won my crown !”

Queen, tear-dazzled, bent her head in grief
æ her brave young knight thus droop and die ;
marvelled much if this were dream or true.

rn awakening, if indeed 'twas dream,
ted their arrival at the moor.
embers of the well-kept watch fires glowed,
id which in groups reclined the men-at-arms
tiently awaiting clearer light ;
till the spectral lake enwrapped the earth
ick, impenetrable, baffling gloom.

iffled sound of horses at full speed
the spongy turf, and then appeared,
iding out of cloud-land, suddenly,
stalwart chiefs—the Bruce and Baliol,
, after quarrel with their king, had deemed

9.

That no wild, savage, and marauding foe
Should touch them with a sacrilegious hand ;
Say, will ye keep that vow ? Are ye prepared
Now on the field to die in their defence ? ”

“ We are ! we are ! ” resounded far and wide.

“ Then Heaven’s blessing rests upon ye all !
Whether ye live or die, henceforth be sure
Salvation to your souls is won this day ! ”

Then spoke the old knight Walter de l’Espece
In tones that first betrayed his weary age
But swelling louder, fuller as he spake
Came forth at last clear, sonorous and deep
Like the rich music of strong manhood’s prime :
“ Hear, Holy Father, nobles, knights and men --
Hear me again beneath the sacred cross
Renew my vow to guard it to the death !
This day, by God’s help, we beat back the Scots

Or it shall be the last day of my life !
Say, noble Albemarle, wilt take my hand
And on such issue pledge thy life with mine ?
'Tis well ! now knightly comrades in this war
Hear an old warrior say his last few words ;
Ye know these savage, unchivalric kernes—
These lawless hordes,—more like to beasts t
men,—

Have wreaked their cruel passions uncontrolled
Not only on their foemen in fair field—
Not only on the spoils of lawful war—
But upon helpless women ; now, Sir Knights
We, by the laws of noble chivalry
Are bound t' avenge such outrage ; failing this—
Through lack of courage, skill, or discipline—
Bethink ye well what follows ; this wild herd
Like bulls and goats or gross wild-boars let loose
Will ravage with hot lust thro' all the land.
What think ye, nobles ? 'twill be sweet to live—
By fleeing, craven-like, from this fair field

To some strong castle's safety ! very sweet
To hear and know,—mewed-up within its walls,—
That the fair dainty ladies of your love
Lie at the tender mercy of these kernes,
Who—ragged, filthy, barelegged as they be—
Will then have shown themselves far better men !
But no,—I see by fire-flashing eyes
And hands that seize their lances with fierce grasp
I need not doubt the youngest of you here !
Conquest or death !—take oath, take oath with me
And Heaven's lightnings blast the first that flies.”

A grand shout filled the air—“Conquest or death !”
“But yet one word ; the wildest courage, knights,
Is worse than wasted without discipline ;
This is our ark of safety from the storm—
Aloft, the holy relics and the Cross
Beneath whose shadow we have sworn to stand ;
And here—in gentle beauty like the dove,
In courage like the eagle,—lo ! your Queen !

The royal gracious Ladye, brave as fair,
Entrusted to your valour by your King !
Who but a recreant—false and foul as hell—
Will dare betray that trust ? ” “ Who dares shall
die ! ”

‘ Well answered ; ‘ He *shall* die ! ’ for should he ‘scape
The foeman’s sword or yours, be sure the King
Will track the hiding coward to his lair
And hang him like a felon ! But I speak
Of things impossible—no man is here
So vile, detestable, as e’en to dream
Of flight or ransom on this battle-field !
Ring round the ark, brave knights, a threefold wall—
Steel in your hearts as hard as on your breasts,
Swerve not ; stand fast ; let no false stratagem
Allure your headstrong valour to break rank :
Through all the brunt of battle on this day
Shoulder to shoulder fight like Paladins—
To God, your King, your country, triply pledged
To guard the Cross, the Queen, and all the land ! ”

"Amen ! amen !" re-echoed through the host ;
For sacred solemn seemed their noble pledge.

Now, save for those who gathered round the ark,
The mist so shrouded all who stood thereon
That the wild fervour of the old knight's speech
Sounded like mystic voice from out the clouds ;
But as he ended, a slight gleam of sun—
'Ale, pure and silvery—shimmered thro' the gloom
And showed, as in a vision swift revealed
And all as swiftly hidden, the fair Queen
On her grand war-horse Raymond, with drawn sword
Raised high in air and pointing to the Cross ;

A light gold helmet, jewelled like a crown,
With snow-white plume surmounted, graced her head
Whilst 'neath the helmet shone her flashing eyes
And face of glorious beauty lighted up
With hope and courage, and with woman's faith
In England's cause and England's gallant knights.

But now the skreeling Pibroch—which had sung
With ever louder, nearer hornet-tone
Its harsh accompaniment to Espec's words—
Rang out its shrill defiance close at hand
And “Alban” “Alban” came the Scottish cry
Of battle onset—followed by a rush
Of fierce uncouth assailants ; some but armed
With clubs and axes, some with spear and sword,
But all with fury in their bloodshot eyes
And quivering nostrils ; shocks of unkempt hair
Hung, as it grew, from cheek and lip and chin,
Giving a savage wildness to their mien :
Thus as they plunged along and came in sight
Scarce three spears off the knights, they well might
seem

Like weird ferocious Demons of the Mist.

On, on, for ever on, in countless hordes,
Raging with curses, cries, and furious blows
Came the vast wave of battle surging wide ;

On, on, with ceaseless, loud, relentless roar
Foaming with passion, maddened by repulse,
Now here, now there, with claymore, spear and axe
Seeking to find some undefended point,
It dashed itself against the rock of steel.

That "rock of steel," had it but wavered once,—
Once left a gap unguarded by a lance,
"All had been lost" on that eventful day !
But, despite o'erstrained arms and battered helms,
And bodies wearied by the long night march
And longer day of never-resting fight—
Despite dull gnawing hunger and mad thirst,
Parched throats, stunned ears, and sore dust-blinded
eyes—

Rock-like it stood in silent bravery
All thro' those fateful, fierce, and stormy hours !

Oh splendid Courage ! Thou in Sparta born !
Quiet, unboasting, stern, enduring, cool,

Silently bearing with unflinching nerve
Pangs that would wring from braggarts craven howls,
Thou art a noble virtue even yet,
E'en in these silken-soft, luxurious days !

Aye, and thou hast not yet quite fled from earth ;
Still Albion's sons with Scotia's Highland chiefs
And fair Hibernia's soldiers, gaily brave,
Have raised thy Standard in a hundred fields !

Speak Pyramids of Egypt, ye who cast
Your dark impassive shadows on red war
Dashing with Gallic fierceness 'gainst the ranks—
The steadfast ranks—of Britain's gallant host !
Speak Pyrenean mountains, whose white peaks
Caught the blood-tint of battle from afar
Where British hardihood beat slowly back
The invading foe, and freed thy war-torn Spain !
Speak Indian deserts, where a dauntless few,
Shoulder to shoulder fighting, crashed their way

rough else o'erwhelming armies! Speak thou North,
ere in the dim light of the morning's dawn
e thin red line of Britain's warriors stood
d bore the brunt of battle through the day!
ve, firm, impassive, as those steel-clad knights,
o still beat back and back the furious Scots.

re hours past noon the curtains of the mist
parting, slow revealed the scene of war;—
ideous scene! thickly as forest trees
omed by the woodman's axe, so round the knights
heaped in wild disorder savage foes
ng or dead; the wounded still essayed
writhe away, thus strewing all the ground
ween the armies, with half-living men.

: dazzling glare of sunlight struck full front
on the archers of the Scottish host,
ice these shot wide; whilst England's bowmen sent,
eadly hail amongst the thronging kernes

Who, armourless, fell pierced like herded stags

The chivalry of Scotland, bravely led
By young Prince Henry, galloped out to charge
The English archers, but in mid-career
Were met by Hugh Montresse and Arlon's knights;
The splendour of a tournament ensued;
The crash of lance, the music of the sword
Had well-nigh tempted forth the Standard guards—
Whose part it was to guard this outer wing—
To join the glorious mêlée.

Montresse fell

In the first shock of charge, with mortal wound,
But Arlon gathering up his knights swooped back,
Then, at full speed, rushed once more on the foe
And drove Prince Henry's lances off the field.

Then came the kernes' rough onslaughts once again,
And lo! now as the sun declining sank,
Casting long shadows o'er the blood-stained plain,

The spear and claymore and huge battleaxe
seemed to grow heavy in th' assailants' hands ;
pause in the rash charges showed the foe
wav'ring, irresolute, as wearied out
With fruitless valour and effectless rage,
like scathing flame consumed by its own heat.
Some leaders here and there might be descried
organising a fresh attack, and rushing forth
to lure the war-hounds once more on the game,
but all in vain ;—the fight was lost and won.
Now was the time for Ranoulf and his men
to shoot their last few arrows closer in
and then burst forward with the men-at-arms
leaning up axe or claymore as they ran ;
and hark ! the thundering gallop of the knights
making the earth beneath them as they rode !
With levelled lances held in iron grasp
With teeth set hard, and saddle firmly gripped
like long-pent storm they burst upon the foe :
few rash gallant Scottish knights rode out

With hopeless bravery to dare the shock,
But horse and man went down before the storm
Like ripened corn before the rushing hail ;
Thus with wild rout, complete and terrible,
The bare-legged kernes disperst like packs of wolves,
Chased, crushed, cut down, or speared as thus they
ran.





Part the Seventh.

The Raid into Scotland.

OF those who 'scaped pursuit but few repassed
The border ; for at night, a moonlit night,
The Saxon villagers, whose herds and homes
Th' invading Scots had harried, issued out
From hidden caves and woods, with staves and bills,
And wreaked a fierce reprisal on their foes.

Meantime the Queen commanded Albemarle
To sound recall ; and, troth to say, the knights
And weary men-at-arms were nothing loth
To rest and feast upon the battle-field.
Yet, ere pursuit was stayed, Gervase outrode
All others in the eagerness of chase,

And singling out a stalwart Scottish knight,
Who with defiant courage stood at bay,
Dashed at him full career ; their lances snapt
To splinters as they met,—then, drawing swords,
They fought like gallant foemen hand to hand ;
But, seeing troops of English riding up
In overwhelming numbers, Gervase said,
“ Yield—yield, brave foe, that so I save thy life.”

The strange knight yielded, and De Bohun then
Had to fight for him stoutly 'gainst his friends ;
Thus at some peril brought him off unharmed,
And after, shared with him his food and tent.

A good deed well repaid ! This stranger knight
Was, at it chanced—(for Gervase, “ happy chance ! ”)
Count D'Auray's kinsman by the mother's side ;
Hence 'twas thro' him the Count had made a pact
To join the Scottish King with all his knights
At turning-point of battle.

Thus it happed
That riding forth to do this traitor's deed,
An arrow pierced him thro' the scheming brain
And thus fulfilled the forecast of his doom.

"Why spake not Bruce and Baliol of this plot
To Albemarle or Walter de l'Espece?"

"The King mistrusted Bruce and Baliol,
And told them nought of D'Auray's treachery."

"But why this treachery?" A tale soon told,
Yet listened to with mad, impatient rage.

"A Saxon maid wrenched from her southern home,—
Her grandsire slain,—was o'er the border sent,
Close guarded by Iachimo his squire.
This was the prize, fore-promised by the King,
That lured D'Auray; who fearing rivals here,
Thought, by this stroke of cunning policy,

To outwit Stephen, Gervase, and Montresse,
Gain high position at King David's court,
And cage the timid dove who 'scaped him once."

"And now! and now!—Where is she? tell me quick!
Lest I go mad and slay thee!"

"Oh! Sir Knight,

Slay me an' welcome, if it pleaseth thee,
But if 'tis thou that lovest this young maid,
A living friend is better than dead foe!
Friend thou hast made me by thy gen'rous deed,
And fast friend will I be to thee in this!
At peril of my fame I'll be thy guide
And aid thee in the rescue of thy love;
Choose threescore knights, the staunchest of the host,
And we'll across the border on our raid!
Some three days' ride from here, perchance e'en less,
A lonely castle, slightly guarded, stands
The lord of which, with most part of his men,
Came forth to join us in this luckless fight;
'Tis there the ladye of thy love is pent;—

There hath she mourned thro' many weary days ;
We'll not waste time in planning rescue now,
But as we ride, devise some stratagem ;
Dost trust me noble foeman ? Need I swear
To answer for thy safety with my life ? ”

“ My hand upon it,” quick replied Gervase,—
“ Eat, drink, and rest ; I go to seek the Queen
And gain her grace for rescue ; then some knights—
Arlon, Bretagne, will join us ; for the rest
They can choose better than a 'wilderer brain
Like mine is now. Farewell.”

The strange knight sate
Pondering his pledge :

“ Was't treason to his King
To compact with his foe to guide him thus
To Scotland's border stronghold ?

Treason ! ha !
Have I risked life on this disgraceful day
To bring the slur of 'traitor' on my name ?

Treason ! foul blot ;—I scorned the crafty count,
E'en when in duty to my King I bore
His subtle message ; shall I now repeat,
In other guise, the thing I so much scorned ?

Hold ;—is this like it ? A young gallant foe,
Maddened for love, as all men are at times,
Has been most foully wrong'd by curst D'Auray ;
His timid ladye-love, like bird encaged,
Pines her young life in durance ; I am pledged
To aid and rescue ; if—unlikely 'if'—
He, having gained his love, should risk his love
For mere ambition and the poor renown
Of winning a Scotch castle ;—well, e'en then,
Perchance I can o'ermatch him at the last !
But 'tis not to be thought on ; a swift ride,
A hurried stratagem, a rescue—flight,
And I—— ?

Will take my chance of what may come of it ! ”


Meantime Gervase had sped him to the Queen
And craved and gained swift grant for this wild raid ;
Her eyes flashed forth approval, and L'Espec
Laid a kind hand upon De Bohun's arm,
And bade him God-speed on his enterprise :
Then out to Arlon and Bretagne he strode
To choose with them their bravest for the morn.

The morn was up,—the bright, fresh, crisp, new morn,
With sparkling dews bejewelled like a bride ;
And forth they rode like huntsmen on the trail.
By noon of the third day they found some game
They scarce had looked for, nor yet much desired ;
On the horizon, where it cut the sky,
They saw retreating horsemen pushing on
As if to reach the border-stronghold first ;
Hence, lest it should be so, the English knights
Spurred on and swift gave chase.

By eventide

They gained upon them shrewdly, and could count

Their numbers,—many fewer than themselves :
Malcolm, the Scottish knight, descried afar,
By shield-device, that he who seemed their chief
Was lord of that lone castle which they sought.

On ! on ! they went, pursuers and pursued,
Until they both drew near the common goal ;
Then, with a dash, the former spurring up,
Joined in wild *mêlée* 'neath the castle walls,
And all rushed pell-mell thro' the castle gates.
Thus, with loud war-cry, crash of lance and swords,
Confusedly the English knights burst in
Hand-to-hand fighting with the fugitives.

But when the castle's lord conceived them trapped
By their own headlong rashness, he laughed loud,
And shouting for his archers, bade them shoot
The saucy Southrons from the upper walls.

Then Malcolm, riding out from all the rest,

Confronted Grahame, and with lordly voice
Said, "Hold, brave countryman! thou know'st me
well!

My gallant friends come not on quest of war,
But for a Saxon damsel here immured
By the false Norman traitor, Count D'Auray.

This noble knight, Sir Gervase de Bohun,
Saved me from death in battle; he (most like
A brave, chivalric, knightly, courteous foe)
Hath freed me without ransom, save but this,
That I should aid in rescue; therefore, now,
If what thou knowest of me aught avails
To win a favour, welcome to thy hall,
For one night's feasting, these our erstwhile foes,
And grant the gentle demoiselle her choice
To stay with thee, or to return with these."

The Grahame paused; a cautious warrior he,
Who weighed, in siege and battle, even-chance

With less of courage than sagacity ;
Hence, in that pause, he scanned the hostile knights ;
(" Greater in numbers, better horsed and armed ! ")
Reflected shrewdly that in wild *mêlée*
His archers might hit friends as well as foes ;
Bethought him also that the English host
Might soon be o'er the border to besiege
And pull his castle down about his ears ;—
So " Policy " and " Chivalry " shook hands !
The swords were sheathed, the horses put in stall,
And knight with knight, who late had met in shock
Of deadly fray—sate brotherly at feast.

Scant care for feast had Gervase de Bohun !
With hasty strides he scaled the winding steps
That led him up to Elfrid's turret room,
From which, with beating heart, the maid had
 watched
The hurly-burly onset of the knights
And marked, or thought she marked, De Bohun's crest.

Now that 'twas o'er, still faster beat her heart
At sound of armed heel upon the stairs,
For timid hope was chased by coward fears ;
But "'twas Gervase !" and Hope transformed to Joy
Rose in its strength and drave away all fears.

The gloomy chamber where she long had pined,
With all its rough and sordid garniture,
Its dank chill floor and bare and blank stone walls,
Seemed at his entrance strangely luminous,
And in that light he shone upon her eyes,—
Transfigured by the spell of Love and Joy
To nobler form and presence.

Still remained

The native gaiety and grace which charmed
Her maiden fancy when the twain first met,
And that chivalric homage to the weak
Which reined obtrusive ardour with strong curb
But the approach to man's maturity
Gave ease and dignity to step and mien

And grafted strength on youthful suppleness.
His features, sunburned to the warrior's hue,
Retained of woman's beauty scarce a trace ;
Battles and sieges, travel, chase, and camp
Had changed them to a larger, sterner type,
Like moulded bronze by graver boldly cut.
Deep, earnest, loving, level-gazing eyes
Flashed from beneath a broad and thoughtful brow;
Whilst strong resolve and habit of command
Had drawn the thin line of his firm-set mouth,
Like to a well-strung bow with downward curve
Most eloquent in silence ; but in speech—
All sternness vanished in a genial smile.

A voice—more rich and mellow than of yore
But still attuned to music by the heart,—
Addressed her now in earnest, trembling tones
Wherein deep pity for her foregone grief,
Fierce, flashing indignation at her wrongs,
Joy at her rescue, hope of brighter days,

And soft persuasion's accents, each in turn
Came with their soothing influence o'er her soul.

But ere he spake, he stood in silent trance,
Wond'ring if this could be the promised heaven
And this his angel at the opened gate ;
Or was it some fair vision of the air
Freshly alighted in the gloomy cell ;
Or lovely statue shaped by highest art,
And from its dream of beauty newly waked
To sudden wonder at its new-found life ?
For poised in lightest attitude she stood,
Her graceful head bent forward, and one arm
Half raised with gesture of expectancy,
Whilst tearful eyes of liquid lustrous blue
Looked innocently forth with wistful gaze
Most piteous in their timid mute appeal.

But as the "statue" woke to thrilling life
The "vision" changed to bright reality ;

And though the "angel" still indeed remained,
It was as "woman," and it dwelt on earth ;
For lo ! the features lighted up with joy—
The cheek at its own conscious paleness blushed,
Smiles came once more, and eyes forgot their tears.

Then short sweet converse followed—oh ! so short ;
Altho' 'twas strange that all the feast was o'er
Long ere De Bohun had returned to Hall ;
Perchance so sweet that kindly-hearted Time
Forbore to tell them of his passing hours :
But ere the passing hours had all gone,
Fair Elfrid, blushing, with downcast eyes
Consented to return to England's Queen.

So merrily at break of morrow's morn
Rode back the joyous raiders tow'rd the camp.
Ha ! what a morn was that for young Gervase !
Enchantment hung bright jewels on the trees—

Rang in the air with fairy peals of bells—
Shone in the glories of the rising sun—
Brought ecstasy with every deep-drawn breath,
And changed the springing turf o'er which they rode
To softest velvet of the richest sheen
With gold and silver flowers all besprent.

A ray of sunshine down a forest glade
Was like a pathway formed by magic art
To lead Imagination to fair scenes
Of ever changing, ever new delights ;
The ring of armour and the rhythmic beat
Of horses' hoofs at speed across the plain
Sounded like stirring music to his ear—
For, joy of joys, at gallop by his side
Rode his loved Elfrid, with her shining hair
Loosened and falling o'er her snow-white neck
In streams of bright pale gold ; her soft cheek flushed
With health and exercise, and eyes so bright
That Gervase found it hard to see aught else.

He scarce knew how it chanced, but words would
come

In lover's cadenced whispers to his lips :

“ Oh, ladye fair ! joy rideth with thee,
Beauty most rare, now bideth with thee ;
Oh, ladye fair ! long have I sought thee,
Oft in despair,—dead have I thought thee :
But thou art living—wilt thou then love me ?
Love loveth giving ;—thou art above me,

Yet I dare ask thee—of thy sweet grace, love,—
Try me and task me—turn thy sweet face, love ;
Hear me, believe me—waking and sleeping
None shall dare grieve thee : safe in my keeping,
None shall dare harm thee ; when I am thine, love,
Oh let me charm thee ;—say thou art mine, love.”

To listen is to yield ; no word came back,
But a bright glance and deeper blush told much.

Then England's Queen received her graciously,—
Whilst Gervase with a flash of pride and joy

Recounted how the rescue had been won,
Received her like a daughter—with embrace
And a soft kiss upon her fair young brow.
Thus reassured, poor timid Elfrid wept
Sweet tears of joy for hope of brighter days,
And then shone forth like April, full of smiles.

Now soon the host its southward march began :
A march of triumph thro' rejoicing towns
And stately cities.

Banners waved in air,
The drums and trumpets sounded far and wide,
The bells rang merrily, the ways were thronged
With gladsome crowds who shouted merrily,
And pressed and struggled but to catch one glance
Of that bright vision of the stately Queen
And the fair Saxon maiden by her side.
For like a vision from the Fairy-land
They came, and tarried, and next day passed on
With "Joy" before them,—leaving "Love" behind.

The Queen aye rode on Raymond, armed and
crowned

As on the day of battle ; Elfrid sate
With easy grace, and perfect skilled command
Upon a gallant palfrey full of fire ;
And Gervase foremost 'mongst the nobles rode
Looking the gayest and the noblest there.

So thus they came to London's ancient Tower
Where Stephen with great pomp received his Quee
Yet with less outward pomp than inward love.

Then royally on Gervase and Bretagne
And all the gallant leaders in that fight,
He showered honours, wealth, and dignity
For guarding her he loved, so faithfully.

'Twas from the King, Bretagne received proud M
With golden dower, lordly broad domains ;—
The King—who at the Castle by the Sea

Had freed his gallant knight from maiden's thrall—
Thus bound him once again in golden chains.

But for Gervase de Bohun was reserved
The last best gift of all,—fair Elfrid's hand ;
Whilst that a crowning grace might so be given
To that which he prized far above aught else,—
That grace was crowned indeed when he received
From the Queen's hand, his own heart's future queen.
Then gaily clanged the merry wedding-bells ;—
And gaily rolled the mighty river's stream
Brilliant with splendid barges,—all ablaze
With cloth of gold and silken canopies,—
Filled full of gallant knights and lovely dames
All eager to do honour to the brides.

But whilst the bells were pealing in the air,
Whilst the loud bridal music rose and fell,
Whilst the gay pageant slowly passed along,
An undertone of sorrow, low and faint,—

So faint that only listening winds could hear,—
Came from the maiden in the river-tower
Whose true love had been slain at Cuton Moor,—
And dying, swan-like, thus she passed away :

‘
“ There is no day on earth without some sorrow,
No joy but what must cast some shadowed sadness ;
Our hearts in vain yearn for a cloudless morrow
To soothe their achings with unbroken gladness.

The brightest summer brings the blackest storm,
Decay lies hidden in the fairest fruit ;
Courage and beauty in their noblest form,
Each hath some lurking canker at its root.

There is no love unfollowed by a grief—
There is no balmy air of Heaven’s breath
Sent to refresh us with a short relief—
That whispereth not in some ear ‘ Pain ’ or ‘ Death.’

Far o’er black waters we descry the light—
The pure white ray shed down from Heaven above ;

There is the realm of joy that hath no night,
The perfect home of sweetest, griefless love !

With hope, not fear, I now await my doom ;—
I plunge not in,—for so I should but drown,—
Drown, drown for aye in that dark water's gloom,
Shrinking and shuddering beneath God's frown.

I plunge not in ;—but lo ! a sail ! a sail !
A mystic ship up-glideth o'er the stream ;—
Hail, Angel of the Lord ! Redeemer hail !
Thou bearest me to Life from Earth's sad dream."

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And last the blue-eyed beauty Lillian,
The little gentle one, whose tiny feet
Would patter o'er the hall, like plashing rain,
Whose softly indistinct and half-formed words
Seemed to make imperfection beautiful.

And the following passage, describing the husband's grief at the loss of his wife, has a beautiful fancy in it:—

Oh! had he in those hours of wretchedness
Stood up in sternness, with the stoic's pride,
A blow so heavy must have broke his heart;
But in humility he bowed his head,
And that vast avalanche of grief passed down,
Leaving its streaks of snow amidst his hair,
And channelled furrows o'er his saddened brow."—*Echo*.

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"Those who know Mr. Gibbs's previous poems will at once recognise the chief characteristics of 'Harold Erle.' The passages which we prefer in the present volume are those descriptive of 'Harold Erle's' youth, and the tour throughout Belgium and up the Rhine."—*Westminster Review*.

"The author of this poem reveals his high and delicate culture. 'Harold Erle' is a powerful story. There are tender touches of consummate grace; and emotions, events, and sacrifices, are narrated, which show how fertile this theme has become in the hands of an accomplished writer."—*British Quarterly*.

"Mr. Gibbs is soon satisfied with showing that he can write as sensationally as any novelist going; and, after this striking opening, settles down into quiet and easy verse."—*Saturday Review*.

"The story itself is one of great interest, wisely, simply, and naturally told, in graceful, vigorous language, enriched with many touches of true poetic genius; but, in many passages, the poem rises to a far higher nobler flight, involving points of keen logic and subtle philosophy, profound religious truth and delicate criticism, such as a refined and highly cultivated intellect alone could handle and express in their present shape. The poem is divided into three sections: of boyhood, youth, and manhood, each marked by a power and beauty of its own, and all well worthy of a true poet,—for such, beyond a doubt, Mr. Gibbs may now claim to be."—*Standard*.

"It may be easily imagined how interesting such a story can be made. The reader will not willingly lay down the book without finishing it,"—*Graphic*.



"The subject, in a dramatic and poetic aspect, offers strong situations, of which Mr. Gibbs has not been slow to avail himself. 'Harold Erle' is marked throughout by the same felicities of expression, the same shrewd and clear sketches of character which distinguished 'The Story of a Life.' Some charming lyrics are scattered through his pages."—*Daily News*.

"'Harold Erle' (his latest work) is a biography, and an excellently told one. Beginning with his school days, the author felicitously follows his hero's career through youth and manhood, and in graceful verse narrates the incidents which befall him. There is a love story interwoven with the plot, which enables the author to display his proficiency in this theme, whilst his descriptive power is exemplified in the following word-picture of Antwerp"—*Morning Post*.

"A poem exhibiting a yet riper development of the author's powers. In his previous work Mr. Gibbs proved the possession of poetic gifts far above the ordinary standard. He has a cultured habit of thought and a melodious distinctness of expression, avoids both periphrasis and obscurity, writes simply and to the purpose, and yet with sufficient polish to bespeak the careful artist. These graces were patent in 'The Story of a Life,' and are recognisable in a still higher form in 'Harold Erle.' "—*Orchestra*.

"The verse moves with smoothness and dignity, and exhibits a quiet grace and truthful analysis of character."—*Public Opinion*.

"'Harold Erle' is a story which it will do busy countrymen as well as townsmen good to read."—*Agricultural Gazette*.

"'Harold Erle' is remarkable for straightforward simplicity of style; the verse flows in smooth and easy rhythm, and the ideas are natural and pleasing."—*Illustrated London News*.

"To some of his readers the first portion of the present work will present the greatest attractions. The character of one of Harold's schoolmasters is thus gracefully delineated."—*The Press and St. James' Chronicle*.

"*Having* really a story to tell, the author does not bore the reader with endless digressions on all subjects that can possibly

be dragged into notice. The narrative in any form would attract attention, but set forth, as it is, in graceful and forcible language, it deserves a high place in public estimation."—*The City Press*.

"A very good tale, in very pleasant verse; in welcome contrast to much that is written now-a-days."—*Examiner*.

"The book closes with a charming picture of the home of Harold and his sisters in Westmoreland."—*Illustrated Review*.

"A poem by one who thinks and writes with power. There are passages of unusual excellence, and we have scarcely observed one weak or halting line. The author's former work won for him high praise, and this proves that it was well bestowed."—*Queen*.

"The story is one of noble self-denial, told gracefully and with much quiet power; and from the time the delicate but high-spirited school boy swoons under the cruel flagellation of a brutal pedagogue, to the last page, the links of the chain are unbroken, and the interest never wavers. In these days of sensuous (not to say sensual) writing, it is gratifying to see so genuine a poet with so pure a pen. Indeed, we cannot do better than quote his own description of 'Harold Erle' as our best criticism of his biographer:—

Not his the skill to shape with dainty art
Lascivious legends for a languid ear,—
Nor his the pliant voice to join the choir
Of Baal's priesthood in their choral chant
To gods of popularity and gold;
But with straightforward singleness of aim
He seized the right, and struck with it at wrong
E'en in defiance of a world in arms.

The volume closes with a magnificent set of verses by way of epilogue."—*Durham Chronicle*.

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RECENT OPINIONS.

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"In 'Kling, Klang, and Klong' there is a neatness of expression and a spirit and point, that will remind many of Thomas Hood's poetry."—*Standard*.

"Although a third edition, we must be allowed to express our admiration of 'The Story of a Life,' exhibiting as it does, deep touches of genius and poetic pathos."—*Exeter Post*.

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"It is as a lyric poet that Mr. Gibbs excels. Since Hood wrote his inimitable satire, 'Miss Kilmansegg's Golden Leg,' we know of no poem which has appeared of equal force and fluency with 'Kling, Klang, and Klong, or Every Thing Wrong.' It satirizes folly as lightly and as keenly, displays a like command of rhyme and rhythm, and points the moral with as exciting a catastrophe. 'An Apology for Dulness in Prosperity' is another striking proof of minute observation, and the power to elicit great thoughts from common things; and the sarcasm of 'Modest Criticisms' is truly called for.

"In the loftier poem 'Kings,' the author rises with his sub-

he speaks strongly, for he feels strongly; his verses are sonorous as the surge of the sea, and read like the presage of an inspired prophet. We recognize in Mr. Gibbs a great poet, fit to rank with Browning and Swinburne in force and conception, and far above the latter in purity."—*Durham Chronicle*.

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